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A Soulless Singer

BY

MARY CATHERINE LEE

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BOSTON AND NEW YORK.

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The Riverside Press, Cambridge

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A SOULLESS SINGER.

CHAPTER I.

A NEW ERA.

When Victoria Montagu heard the declaration that in this world no person may have more than one real friend, she said to herself, without need of reflection, that, decidedly, hers was General Grant. Not the hero of our national history, but the general who had formerly belonged to Mr. Danvers, and who, having been a faithful and only dog to his master for six years, and holding the position with dignity as well as fidelity, was confounded by the appearance of a wretched, supplanting young setter in the stable. The general viewed this situation with jealous grief for one night, but early in the morning, with tail proudly hoisted and

head erect, he deserted. For days he wandered, getting more and more emaciated, seeking a worthier master, looking wistfully into all the faces he met, with brows lifted so that there were two lines above his eyes, which gave him a careworn expression, when one day he saw a masterful-looking girl take a seat on one of the benches in the park. He watched her from over by the fountain, where he had stopped to have a drink. She looked at all things as if she had made them, and they belonged to her, and were altogether satisfactory. When this appropriating look fell upon the general, his ears ceased to droop, the lines on his brow relaxed, and trotting over, he laid his nose on that girl's lap, and cried out his "Eureka," in rather faint and whimpering tones, it must be confessed. Victoria admired the superb creature, and consented to accept his offer of himself after Mr. Danvers had, in turn, renounced him for his infidelity, and begged her to keep him

if she liked. On all succeeding evenings, then, when she had the offer of an escort, Miss Montagu replied, "Thanks, but my friend the general is with me," and the straight, slim, remarkable-looking girl, with a grand mastiff striding along beside her, was everywhere recognized as the proud, self-sufficient Miss Montagu, who was going to be, at least, a prima donna.

So she had elected, and she was clearly built and fitted out for triumph. Besides her splendid self-reliance, her magnificent assurance, she had a voice of rare compass and quality, she was dramatic, and she was determined.

She had even chosen a name to agree with what she expected of herself. The one given her by her sponsors had been Violet, but at the age of fourteen she proved its inappropriateness by declaring herself, in a large, bold hand, in all her signatures, Victoria Montagu.

The amendment was universally ap-

proved and accepted, for Victoria was a tall, victorious-looking girl, with no especially flower-like qualities, for her beauty was more like that of a graceful, blossoming tree.

She had been almost born an orphan, and at the very earliest possibility, her strength of spirit was applied to making some resource for herself. As her most obvious gifts had been generously cultivated by a far-away relative, she undertook, with immediate success, to be a teacher of the piano, at the same time that she studied to gain her more ambitious end. Between what she was obliged to do and what she longed to do, she drudged one half the time and worked joyfully the other half. At eighteen, she was an independent, solitary girl, who, having settled for herself what she would live for, lived for it devotedly. She felt that no judge could be severer with her than she was in her own requirements of herself. She ruled herself

with a despotism that would have been cruel in another.

But now, at length, Miss Montagu's possibilities are to be put to the test. She is to sing at a great private concert, at which will be present an old and distinguished master of music. He is to judge her. If his judgment be favorable, she will rise to the high ground of being under his advice and direction. She has pinched herself unmercifully in order to have a charming new white silk gown and costly roses for the concert.

In these behold her. She stands drawing on her gloves. She is going out with a woman who calls herself a chaperone, and "chaperone" seems to mean somebody who needs attendance, she is such a weak, incapable-looking person beside Victoria.

As she slowly moulds the soft kid upon one fine hand, the future prima donna looks approvingly, even in her distraction, upon the strength, the suppleness, the expressive-

ness of the other. She enjoys her hands, and making constant use of them begets innumerable little satisfactions, which go to swell the serene complacency of her self-trust.

Her dark gray eyes have not the soft sweetness of girlish eyes; they are, perhaps, too splendid, and they lack something which mortals look for wistfully in the eyes of their fellow-beings, — something which, for lack of another name, may be called sympathy. The lines of brow and lip, of cheek and chin, suggest the grace of something antique, — some Pallas or Diana in the marble. Her face is not flushed with the excitement of the hour; it is pale and calm. Her smooth, dark hair, just lifted back from her brow, defines a head which, for the very pleasure of fitness, one would like to see wreathed with long, graceful laurel leaves. It is a figure of lovely contour; noble, in spite of its young slightness. To look at it seems a privilege

graciously accorded. The white silk surrounds her with a soft, hallucinating radiance; the great, rich roses breathe their fragrance upon her. So she is whirled away in her hired carriage to the grand concert, to which we are not invited.

The general saw Victoria and her chaperone depart, and then settled himself on his rug with the importance of a vicegerent. As the hours moved on, and there seemed no disposition on the part of anybody to invade the realm, he gave himself no anxiety, except at the sounds of carriages. Vain for him was the excited barking of fellow dogs in the neighborhood, or the tantalizing whine of cats, or the bold swoop of rats down behind the wall plaster; but at the sound of a halting carriage, he lifted his ears, and then his head, from very light dozings, and slowly replaced his nose on his paws when the wrong one had rumbled on. Never once did he roll over and

stretch himself out, though it seemed at length far too long that his mistress had been gone.

But finally the right carriage came, and his nose was instantly at the crack of the closed door. He heard every footstep with a wider and quicker swing of his tail. The voice of the chaperone sounded cheerful and voluble, as if she were under pleasant excitement. The general barked with the intention of sharing it. The joyous salutation must have been heard, for the coming feet were then just outside the door, yet when it opened, Victoria came in without giving him a word. There were flowers in her hands and a look like terror on her face. She dropped into a chair, still without a word or a smile.

It was not for minutes, but until the little clock had struck the hour and half-hour again, again, and again, that the general continued waiting, and pleading with his eyes, in sorrowful dismay. Once

Victoria laid her hand absently upon his head, and he whimpered for joy.

There they sat, in the deep, early-morning slumber of the town. Much did the poor animal wonder and shiver. It seemed to him that an astounding new era had begun.

And so it seemed to Victoria. She was appalled by a strange feeling of being some other person, and not herself, — some person she in vain refused to be. Bounteous compliment, unbounded applause, had followed her singing, but where had been the magnetic thrill which she ought to have felt, and again felt, with a double consciousness, as it returned to her from her audience? What, above all, meant the chill which fell upon her when she met the dumb courtesy — the superfluous courtesy — of the master? She had sung splendidly. She was sure of that. She had been plenteously assured. But why did the master's inscrutable manner seem to annul it all?

She would soon be made aware, for he had

promised to come and see her on the morrow, which nominated the morrow as the real day of doom.

She met it with a large decrease of her usual calm air of sovereignty. There was even something of the flutter to be expected in a girl.

The general watched savagely for the enemy, — the one who had upset the peace, — and when, at five o'clock, a man appeared with long whiskers at the corners of his mouth, like a cat, and glass covers on his eyes, which made them look round and staring, exactly like a cat's, and who walked with the soft precision of a cat, and absolutely had some fur on him, too, round his neck and wrists, as though he had been skinned, but not thoroughly, the great animal got up with a growling advance, which startled the visitor, and altogether multiplied the dread omens of the occasion.

But apart from his accidental aspect, the master was not at all of the feline type. He

was, indeed, especially frank; in some directions, even sympathetic. It was because something unusual in this girl had interested him, that he had come. Not many young aspirants had visits from the master. He made his bow, pattered across the matted floor with his soft step, moving on to the piano, where he examined some of Victoria's music, without wasting a word or a moment upon matters he had not come to discuss.

"You are also a pianist?" he said.

"I merely have pupils," Victoria answered.

"Will you have the kindness to play this for me?"

He placed on the rack a ballade of Chopin, in which an air of tropical languor and richness is worked up into an ecstatic romance, — passionate to melancholy.

Victoria played it, while the master listened with bent head, hands clasped behind him, and eyes that never wandered from the front right-hand caster of the piano.

"Parefectly exact," he said, when she had

finished. "Altogedder exact," he repeated, lapsing from his good English accent, and stroking his long mustache thoughtfully, while Victoria sat wondering and waiting for the next word. "You should be a *successful* teacher of the piano-forte, Mees Montagu, — of its méchanique, its technique. No doubt you are," he added, with a deferential gesture. He had the manner of wishing to do her some service. "There is, however, the same want as in the singing," he continued. "It is difficult to speak it, but you lack — shall we say that it is soul? And is it possible that a body should go out with the purpose to move the world to enthusiasm without its soul? It can never be, my dear young lady. You have a voice, — a voice quite remarkable. That is the body; but it needs that you should find its soul. It needs that you should learn the cry of the human heart. You understand the language of the music, — its accent, its phrase, its punctuation, but you have yet to

know the language of this soul. You do not go away from yourself. It is not Elsa, — it is not Marguerite who sings. It is Mees Montagu. It is not in the great feeling that you are concerned, but in that technique, and in that career of Mees Montagu. You shall put yourself away — *away*," — with a gesture of flinging something aside, — "you shall put the emotion of Elsa into the place of it, and — if this could be "—

"It must be," said Victoria desperately.

"I do not know; I do *not* know," said the master, with his hands raised, palms outward, and vibrating an accompaniment to the unhopeful shake of his head. "Sometimes it is of the nature."

"But is n't it a part of what I am to learn, — to sing with the true expression?" Victoria asked, with the panting courage of one who struggles for life.

The master's eyes appeared to snap out sparks. "You have heard that it is a trick to be learned?" he cried. "Very well.

Even so, I am both a teacher and a tyrant. I demand of my pupil a warm soul from which to draw the expression. Does she demand of me that I shall supply this?" He shook himself all over with negations. "There is not the artificial soul, even," he added. "You do not substitute for passion the artful imitation of it."

Victoria's expression of alarm made the general get up. The master looked at him apprehensively, but boldly continued: "Pardon, pardon, you are too honest, so to speak, in your self-assertion. Dear Mees Montagu, I regret" —

"Don't say it! Oh, *don't* say it!" Victoria entreated, clinging to the edge of the piano until her nails made scratches on it. "I shall find that soul! I must find it!"

She looked white and agonized, and her tone was like that of one who suffers. The general growled again, and put another check upon the master's polite declination. He was so unpleasantly impressed by the man-

ners of the dog that he desired to cut his visit short; but he was pleased with the brave spirit of the girl.

"*Ach, liebes fräulein*, it is a great mistake if you have not the soul somewhere, — *somewhere*," he said, smiling kindly. "Possibly it is buried, living. Find it; exhume it; and let me come to give it a very glad welcome." Saying this, he bowed himself out with a deep reverence.

Victoria remained clinging to the piano, stunned. She might appeal to some other authority. There were, probably, those who would undertake to fit her for her chosen career without that exquisite soulful quality which the master required. But no; she would have the approval and guidance of the highest, the most critical. Nothing less would content her. Her ambition was not cooled, but heated, and although her sorrow was that of one who sits at the funeral of her hope, she was extremely well supported by an almost effectual determination to achieve the thing she lacked.

She looked very lonely and weary that evening in her strangely unadorned apartment. There was little that she could claim as her own there. But all the familiar belongings of the solitary are dear and important to them, and Victoria always came back to her few possessions with a comfort and satisfaction that some persons only feel at reunion with their best-beloved comrades, and other persons never feel at all. Her little snowy, ruffled pincushion, her Doulton-ware jug, her lacquered tray for the lesser appointments of her toilet, her own bottles and brushes and Sorrento-wood hand-mirror on her dressing bureau, her bust of Beethoven, her picture of Liszt at his piano, and her musical library in her sitting-room were her Lares and Penates. With them she was at home. And when she put them, or some of them, into the trunk which stood in a corner of her bedroom through the remaining portion of the year, and journeyed to a little Quaker village on the coast, to pass

a few weeks of the summer, she had a feeling of fondness as she saw her trunk, which held her things, pass down the platform of the station on the baggage truck; and she felt injured and indignant if it chanced to be tossed about and other baggage heaped upon it. Her hired piano was regarded as a somewhat unworthy temporary partner and coadjutor. For all that was not her own in the hired apartment, she felt the indifference applicable to casual servers of her need.

Her need was remarkably concentrated. She gathered none of the souvenirs and pretty nothings that girls like to hang up and scatter round about them, — no photographs of dearest friends and adored ideals. Her bust of Beethoven and her picture of Liszt were given her by her pupils. There was no evidence of the enthusiasm which most girls would have exhibited for the great ones in that line she had chosen for herself. Some person invidiously explained

that this was because the only great singer Victoria regarded with interest was her own future self.

On that first evening of her bitter sorrow and disappointment, this love of her own expanded into a passionate claim of that which ought to have been hers. Not for one moment did she submit to the supposition that she was to remain destitute. She demanded of herself where had been buried that priceless property which, in order that life might resume its value, she must find and exhume.

As she paced up and down in her agitation, her only living companion followed anxiously, his ears laid back, and his brown eyes dark with troubled wonder. At every glance vouchsafed to him he pressed forward with eagerness to repeat his assurances of fidelity.

"My poor old fellow," said Victoria, stooping to him at length, "they say we have n't any souls, — you and I. We can't

remain guilty of such a charge as that. What shall we do about it?"

The general did not seem to be prepared with an answer to that puzzle.

"Well, now, good-night," said his mistress, "I can't have you stand gazing at my discomfiture any longer."

She pulled his ear, — a caress he very much liked, — gave him her kindest pat, and opening the door, bade him another good-night. He trotted away downstairs, barking for admittance at intervening doors, hindered here and there by misprized attentions from persons whom he met on his way, and finally reached his bed in the laundry.

The house was very quiet, so that the emphatic closing of a door by some never-mind-anybody-else sort of person was felt as well as heard.

The general could not at once satisfy himself with the arrangement of his bed. He tossed up the straw, and twisting him-

self into a half-circle, went crouching round and round before settling down. This he repeated several times, in the fashion dogs are said to have inherited from their burrowing, savage ancestors.

The general was as particular and persistent in having a deep hollow as if he had been a savage ancestor himself, and it was long before he made his final finish, and with a great sigh settled his lips with a slow tasting motion, in sleepy comfort, when a piteous cry swept away the stillness, leaking through every crack until it reached the general's ears, — the cry of his mistress in agony and terror, — at which he leaped up with a furious bark, and sprang up the basement stairs. The door was not only shut, but locked.

In a frenzy the poor fellow beat upon it, plowed great furrows in it with his powerful claws, gnawed at it with his strong teeth, yelping the while like a savage. At intervals he listened, and

heard sounds of opening doors and hurrying feet, then resumed the attack with increased madness, and with howlings more prolonged. But nobody heard him; nobody heeded him; and at length, as if dragged down by the weight of his despair, he fell prostrate in the narrow passage, with his nose between his paws, and grieved like a heart-broken human.

The next morning, when the cook opened the door to get a broom, she cried out; the waitress cried out; various other members of the household exclaimed, in regular sequence, as they stood in the way of the general's mad plunge through the house to the door of his mistress's room.

There he sat down, and hearkened eagerly to the gentle sounds within. He was too well-bred to enter without an invitation, even if he could.

It was very long before he could. Day after day he was allowed to lie there, but was not admitted. A soft-footed man and

a white-capped woman seemed to be the only persons favored with this privilege. It was an exciting and hopeful event whenever they opened the door. They spoke to him compassionately, but he looked at them suspiciously, and resented their attentions.

One day the man brought a little box, and stayed grievously long. It was deathly still inside, and a strange, subtle odor stole out through the crack under the door where the general's nose always lay. One would have said, "as patient as a dog," if he had wished to go a step beyond Job, and had known the general. Job had the refreshment of speaking of his troubles to the end of a good many chapters. But supreme patience is in silence.

This infinite patience was at length rewarded. One morning the door opened, and a faint voice from within called him to come. He stopped for just one instant of apprehensive survey on the threshold, and saw a slight figure in a great reclining-

chair. Then with a low cry, half-fearfully, by long trotting steps, every inch of him quivering, his tail held close but fluttering wildly, his ears drooping and rising, his neck outstretched, his eyes shining, he went on in the straightest line possible, until he laid his head gently — he saw that it must be gently — in the old place on his mistress's lap.

Almost swaying from his foothold with the impetus of his swinging tail, he waited for the accustomed pats, the delightful pulls at his ears, the caressing strokes of his neck, without which he could not feel that he had been welcomed.

But they were not given to him.

His mistress did not touch him with her soft, kind hands, as she used to do. She let them lie covered upon her lap. She spoke to him; smiled upon him; but there was a pang of disappointment visible in the loving eyes of the dog, which she understood. She tried to raise herself.

"Nurse, help me!" she cried, and leaning over, she rested her face on the general's neck, and wet it with her tears.

The little silk coverlet fell off.

Pitiful heaven! There were no hands!

CHAPTER II.

FERDINAND, AND A STRAY GUITAR.

So it seemed to the general, who saw only the bandages; but there were, in fact, the ruins of Victoria's once busy, beautiful hands.

After the general had been sent away, and she had been making ready for sleep, in that last evening and last hour of their beauty, she discovered the gloves she had worn on the previous evening, still lying neglected on her dressing bureau. It was an automatic habit, with which her sorrow did not interfere, to restore everything to order before putting it away. She had discolored her gloves in returning from the concert by the manner in which she had grasped the dark old upholstering of the

carriage in the first moments of sinking under her consternation. It required naphtha to make them tidy again, and when they were drying on her hands, with unconscious imprudence, she held them close under the gaslight to see if they were thoroughly nice, and in a flash the tender hands were gloved in flames.

Over and over since that night Victoria had said and repeated, "No hands, and no soul!"

This second shock to her tired nerves left her shattered and helpless, and she was too proud to accept the compassionate assistance which would have been gladly and abundantly given. To preserve her independence, she would need to go from the costly city, which had furnished her with opportunity and advantage while she could work, and have a home (until she recovered) in some humble region. She had never wished for anything small, and there was something almost like grandeur in the infinity of small-

ness to which, in her own estimation, she had come.

That necessity for finding a new home turned her mind at once to the little Quaker settlement down by the sea, where she had passed some summers in the plain old homestead of Nathan and Susannah Green. She had had at least one ground for liking that place. Not far down the coast there were villas and cottages, one of them the summer home of the master. It had been a satisfaction to reside in the neighborhood of that power which was to help lift her to the summit of her ambition, as she supposed. It had been a gratification even to see him go driving by with his guests, men and women of note, great virtuosos and eminent composers from over the sea, and once an adored prima donna. Sometimes she had hired Nathan Green's son Caleb to take her down the shore road in the wagon, of an evening, past the master's cottage, to catch some of its music. It was thus that she had

heard the great prima donna sing like an angel.

She had felt that she lived just without the gates of Paradise, in Nathan and Susannah Green's old house. Now, as a rejected peri, to be outside the gate was a very different matter.

One morning of the spring, Friend Rhoda Freeman looked up from the edifying copies she was setting for her pupils, with the double intent of teaching them to write right and to behave right. She looked up with a slight frown, for there were sounds of whispering among the children. The frown melted into a genial smile, however, when she saw, at one of the snowy-curtained windows, as a barrier to the flooding sunshine, a pale, sad face peeping in through the clean little panes, — the face of that girl who had heretofore come with the summer, and seemed a part of its brightness. The face was the same, yet not the same. Even the children noted the changes in it.

Rhoda hastened, but sedately, to open the door and welcome Victoria to the school-room. She had welcomed her to the village two or three days before. She brought a rocking-chair from her keeping-room, and saw her visitor properly seated, with few words and no compliments, and then turned her attention strictly and conscientiously to the small class in arithmetic, which then held the floor.

So Victoria was left to mutely survey the scene. It seemed inexpressibly dull and poor. She listened with lassitude to the mistaken view of a scholar who boldly supported the theory that as three times three were nine, three times one third was one ninth, and to Rhoda correcting this opinion. She watched Rhoda herself, prim and calm as the solitary pine-tree over by her field fence, her gentle face and smile betraying her loving and rather merry nature under a certain duteous affectation of sternness. Victoria felt something like affection for

Rhoda. She had even been confidential with her about herself and her career, to which Rhoda had once responded, with a twinkle in her eye, "Thee has left a little corner, I perceive, for thy fellow beings to stand in, and look on at this career of thine."

Victoria, quite in a corner herself, now, looked with a mixture of apathy and distant pity upon these youthful fellow beings who were born to it. They had never had a moment's attention from her before. They regarded her with an unpleasant furtiveness, or a more unpleasant fixity. She thought they were a strange, unhappy collection. She did not individualize until Rhoda, with even, unhurried steps, made a bee line towards one of them, and laying her hand on his shoulder, said in the gentlest voice possible, "Ferd'nand Compton, if thee don't quit these performances of thine, I 'll shake thee."

The room was so warm with its needless fire, that the ends of the pine logs on the

wood basket sparkled with great oozing drops of pitch, clear and golden, as if it had been a condensation of the surfeit of sunshine they had drunk, and on the sill of the window, which had been opened for relief, the boy was arranging some contraband article, which Rhoda captured, and, bidding the culprit to his seat, returned with it to her desk, the same quiet in her sea-blue eyes, and using the same number of steps which it had cost her to arrive upon the recreant urchin.

Victoria looked at him, now demurely seated in the middle row, and wondered she had not noticed before that fine, intense face, framed in ragged locks of bright brown hair, which had been chopped short on his forehead with the simple intent to keep them out of his eyes. He raised these eyes, fixed them for an instant upon her, and then drooping his graceful head over his book, assumed the appearance of an absorbed student.

The confiscated toy on the desk was a long, slender box, neatly made of thinnest pine, with a lyre-shaped opening in the middle of the top, across which were strung horsehairs, and these were fastened upon tiny pegs at either end, — an æolian harp, in fact.

Victoria looked at it until she had perceived all this, and then glanced at the boy with her sad half-smile. He caught it, and returned it with a glad whole one, and drooped his head lower.

The arithmetic class, dismissed, tiptoed and scuffled to its seats, and the whole school was then set free for recess.

Ferdinand came directly to the desk, and touching his harp said, —

"May I have it now? I forgot. It was such a good breeze!"

"In order to help thy memory, thee may let it remain here until thee goes home to-night," said Rhoda.

He was turning away.

"Who made your harp?" Victoria asked him.

"Grandfather."

"It 's a nice kind of plaything."

"Oh no," Ferdinand responded, "it is n't a plaything. We just listen to it."

"Who?"

"Grandfather 'nd me."

"Oh, your grandfather, — the one who made it?"

"Yes. Sometimes it makes him cry, but he likes it, too."

"I should like to hear it," said Victoria, with a longing that her numbness of spirit might be relieved by tears. She remembered the mixture of awe and delight with which, in her childhood, she had listened to the wild chords struck by invisible fingers.

"Thee can hear it whenever Friend Rhoda is willing, but I 'd rather hear thee sing," said the boy, smiling radiantly. He seemed to have a glowing, ever-animated spirit.

"How do you know that I sing?" Victoria asked with surprise.

"I heard thee, down on the Quisquanesset shore, last summer."

"How was it that I had n't the pleasure of seeing you on the shore?"

"We were up on the cliff. Thee did n't look up."

"Who were on the cliff?"

"Grandfather 'nd me; and we looked down and saw thee and thy dog sitting on the shore. Thee was singing, and making thy hands go *so*." He imitated some dramatic gestures. "We heard thee many times. I used to go to the shore with grandfather almost every day."

"What was that for?"

"He wants to be near the water. He sailed on it a good many years, and he loves it."

It pleased Victoria a little to listen to the strangely sweet, soft accents of the boy, or more especially to look at his picturesque face, so she proposed another question.

"Well, has he done sailing?"

"He 's too sick; he can't; so he used to go and sit and look at the sea."

"Used to? Does n't he still go?"

"When it 's real warm; but he can't walk now. In the winter he could only see a little piece of it, far off, through the window. Then he felt homesick."

"Ah, I 'm sorry," said Victoria sincerely. The picture she had in her mind of the old sea-lover, who made æolian harps and wept over them, was poetic and interesting. "But now," she added, "you 'd better run and get your recess. You 'll lose it."

The boy quickly understood this as a dismissal, and moved away.

"Who is he?" Victoria asked.

"Why, don't thee remember Captain Compton's grandchild, whose parents left him here to go to South America?" Rhoda suggested.

"I never saw the boy before," Victoria declared.

"His mother died in Lima, where she was born, and his father has n't come back," added Rhoda. "He 's a little out of his head, is Ferd'nand, about these noises, I think. He 'll sit and listen to that harp, as thee calls it, all recess, and never think to play. And there 's a common marsh quail, — medder lark, maybe thee would say, — that comes and sits on the top of that pine-tree over by the fence, and goes through the regular chirps they all make. 'T was awhile before I could break him of getting up and running to the window when he heard it, as pleased as if somebody was there offering him a dollar. But if I go out to my well, and draw up the bucket, and it don't squeak jest so, he screws up his face as if he had a toothache."

"I like him," said Victoria.

"Yes, poor child, he 's a good boy, if he was only a little more stiddy-minded," said Rhoda. "He needs somebody to see to that, but his step-grandmother, the cap-

tain's second wife, is too stern with the boy. I tell her so myself. I ain't sure but there 's a little mite of jealousy in that quarter, for Ferd'nand and his grandfather are devoted companions, and just alike about the noises. That 's what Hannah Compton can't abide, — these harps, and Ferd'nand chirpin' and singin'. She 's a strict orthodox Friend. There is n't much Quaker blood in Ferd'nand. He 's like his Spanish mother."

"Quaker and Spanish! What a combination! Well, Ferdinand has an ear and an eye and an enthusiasm that I should like to meet again," said Victoria.

To a girl who had always been busy, Victoria's forced idleness was grievous to be borne. The same restlessness which had sent her to see Rhoda in her school made her feel, when the children were about to be called in, that she could endure no more school. She took her departure with eagerness, and the general, just returned from

a dashing hunt after woodchucks, was delighted to have her turn in the direction of the woods. He bounded deep into the wild places, and striking a lonely cross-road, turned back to her with forelegs thrust forward for a prance, mouth open in a broad dog smile, and a plea in his eyes for permission to continue his course. He was happy to have things like old times again.

Victoria followed his lead without aim and with little interest, pushing her way between the young pines, and stooping under low branches that breathed their balsamy fragrance upon her at every step.

Along the roadside, under the shade of the stone wall, stood an arrayed army of young, unfolded ferns, stems erect and tops curled under, like interrogation points. Victoria would have liked to extort as many answers. To have discovered sorrow made the whole universe inscrutable to her.

The day was summer-like, though it was

early in April. "The arbutus ought to come out," she said, "with such a warm invitation." She knew where it ought to be. She had seen its bereft leaves in the summer time. By turning up the pine needles with her toes, she found it, luxuriant with darling buds, and even a few blossoms. She could gather not one, with her wrapped-up hands, but she kneeled down to them and breathed their delicious, unplucked fragrance for the first time with pure pain. "I seem to be the only thing that does not come to life," she said. Her chest heaved. Without a tear she sobbed and went on.

She came out near a vacant old house, too far from the conditions of human living to give habitation to the people of that day. She remembered the story of the one who had lived there long ago, but she had never before wished for other than an outside view of it. On that day, however, she fancied she would like to look within, upon the stage where strange and lonely scenes

had been played, to what spectators none living knew.

She climbed the sunken steps, pushed open the sagging door by throwing her weight upon it, and sent a community of swallows twittering out into the sunshine. The general hesitated, and then went sniffing towards the fireplace.

Victoria stood shrinking upon the threshold, then took a few steps across to peer through the solemn emptiness. As she left the door, it banged together from general inclination and a draught from the paneless windows. She did not like the sensation of being shut into the dreary place. It repelled her through every sense. Forgetting her helplessness, in a sort of panic, she turned to open the door. It stuck so fast that it needed a strong pull, but this, alas, could not be furnished. She flew to the other door. That also required a pull, and, moreover, there was nothing to pull upon, — no knob, no latch. She could not have

raised a window-sash, glued down by time, if her hands had been well.

Under these circumstances, she stood staring out into the desolate wood road, where nobody lived, and nobody came who was wise enough to take the better way.

She pressed close to a sunny window, and tried to hope that somebody would soon come along. She gave her attention to the sweetness outside, meaning to exclude from her thought the crumbling old ruin which was her prison; then started and turned back at unaccountable sounds; and in doing so, caught sight of places on the doors worn by the touch of hands, and others on the threshold made by coming and going feet.

These imprints of years of living seemed only to give emphasis to the present deathliness.

The general disapproved of it all, — of the place itself and the delay, — and proposed to depart; but when Victoria said

"We must wait," he settled down and waited restlessly.

"But for how long?" Victoria inquired of the scant possibilities. She shivered with a nervous ague as she directly sank down from weariness, which took no account of fastidiousness, upon a very dusty window-sill, built out to hold flower-pots.

She had a terror of rats, but she hoped it was only rats that made such swift glissades from room to room, provoking the general to numerous growls and plunges.

She decided that the only relief she could apply was that of listening to the lively birds.

The boring of a busy woodpecker under the gable had a matter-of-fact, comfortable sound. She knew what that was, for she had watched him from the outside, and her approach had frightened him to the refuge of a sprawling, lichen-covered old apple-tree. From this same tree a motherly phœbe-bird peeped in at her, and seemed inquiring

sweetly whether this, at last, was Phœbe. These and the blithe staccato of the chica-deedees dispelled some of that feeling of unearthliness. It was scarcely possible to listen to and watch those happy creatures of the frank daytime for half an hour without some gain of tranquillity and cheer.

At length Victoria began to look about with her usual courage. She wondered if that cupboard on the side of the chimney could be the one where they found the papers which showed that the sorrowful exile who had buried himself here, in order to be as one dead, was a man whose patriotism ought to have been mentioned in the history of his country.

She desired to see the place where he had laid his precious home relics away, and venturing across the floor, opened the loose cupboard door.

In place of the void she had expected, there was within a guitar case, — no chattel of the exile, evidently, for it seemed to have

been constantly and carefully kept. There was no more dust upon it than if it had been just laid aside in a lady's boudoir. She lifted the lid. The guitar itself was there. All her previous sensations were swallowed up in wonder.

CHAPTER III.

A SIREN VOICE.

RETURNING to her seat on the window-sill, Victoria tried to occupy herself by supposing a history for the guitar. As the field for supposition was wide, she wandered far, and lost herself in search of any plausible excuse for so irrelevant a gayety within those sombre walls. From any evidence she had ever had in regard to the gifts and inclinations of those seamen, fishermen, and farmers, of Quaker traditions, and their very similar offspring, this accompaniment of romance and song was very far astray.

What story could it tell, if it had voice?

Who would it, perhaps, bring to her isolated prison, — and when?

It was ground for either comfort or fur-

ther trepidation, — this single association with human life.

Out of this exciting reverie, she was startled, presently, by the sound of a few distinct notes of delicious melody and quality, of silver-bell clearness, and a singular chromatic progression. What bird of heaven could that be?

Then, from the same throat, as it seemed, full, rich, and resonant, there came in running succession the notes of the song-sparrow, the meadow-lark, the oriole, and finally, in most remarkable modulations, the gushing purl and carol of the thrush, swelling to full strength, — far beyond bird strength, indeed, — then falling into low cadences of unearthly sweetness. It was not the time of day nor year for the thrush to sing, and who ever heard all the birds of field and forest follow each other in regular rapid sequence, as of one breath, one will?

Victoria pressed forward in dilating surprise. In her eagerness to catch it all, she

leaned hard against the old window sash. Suddenly a soprano voice of marvelous purity and richness burst into the strains of

"Oh haste, crimson morning."

The owner of the guitar, perhaps, was coming! Victoria's heart stood still. She felt that she was about to come in contact with something strange. Could there be a human voice like that in this region of deprivations? Its people were too austere, too scantily endowed, to rejoice in such an efflorescence. She forgot all dread, and listened entranced. The voice mellowed and floated into the sweet old air of "Casta Diva." She pressed eagerly, and more eagerly, against the window sash — that had looked so strong — until it snapped. She threw her excited strength against it. It crashed outward, and left her a way of escape.

Exulting, she sat out upon the sill, and dropped to the ground. The general leaped after, and away they flew, Victoria pursuing

the voice, and the general pursuing Victoria. Witch or woman, bird, angel, demon, or human, she cared not which it might be; she only pressed on to reach the source of those ravishing sounds. Her feet caught in the long runners of the blackberry vines, and she fell, hurting her tender hands. With involuntary tears of pain she sprang up and on again, tearing her carefully economized gown, but regarding only the danger of losing the creature with that heavenly voice.

It seemed to come from the direction of the main road. Now she feared it had finished, and again it soared and sank more distinctly and divinely than ever. She gained upon it, she felt the sounds nearer and nearer. They changed again to bird-notes, died away, — and ceased altogether.

When Victoria came out upon the highway, breathless, and looked up and down for half a mile, there was no sign of anything that could by any natural possibility

have sung the worn old airs from "Lucia" and "Norma" so divinely (though incorrectly) as to make them young again.

There was only a very old buggy, out of which gleamed the lenses of a pair of silver-bowed spectacles, firmly mounted upon a nose that would have recommended its owner to Napoleon Buonaparte, who always chose a person with a large nose for places of responsibility in any great enterprise. This nose was the centre of a strong, ruddy face, which, as a whole, agreed with the nose itself in promises of capability and enterprise, and the face was framed in a black Quaker bonnet, the white lining of which brought out the ruddiness with strong effect.

These were some of the features of the driver of the advancing equipage. Victoria, unobserved, heard her saying in a strong voice, "Do I drive too fast for thee, dear?" and at the same time the willing horse changed his jog-trot to a lazy walk.

The other occupant of the buggy was a

man so much wrapped up that only the middle of his face was visible; a pair of the gentlest blue eyes, Victoria said to herself, that she had ever seen, — but they had that clear brightness which only comes when a soul is putting off the mortal, — and above them, brown eyebrows faded by weather and salt water; below, a sensitive nose and mouth.

They were moving so slowly that Victoria ventured to offer a remark as they passed, in country fashion.

"Excuse me. Did you hear that wonderful voice?" she asked.

The woman gave a surprised jerk to the reins.

"Voice? No," said she. "What kind of a voice?"

"Why, a pure soprano, wild as a bird's, but rich and sweet as honey."

The woman stared in silence. This was queer talk.

"Who is there in these parts that sings

with such a voice, and sings airs from operas?" Victoria continued.

"Will thee say more plainly what thee means?" said the Quakeress with a chilly, wondering speculation, which made it seem that wonder and speculation were never fitly and fully expressed except through a pair of spectacles.

"I only mean that somebody has gone across that corner of the wood, singing beautifully," Victoria explained.

"Humph!" said the woman, and the man's eyes seemed to have a troubled look as he cast them down.

"Don't you know such a singer?" Victoria asked, in a pleading tone.

"No, I don't," the woman answered, decidedly, but the man said, changing the topic, —

"I think this must be Victoria Montagu?"

"Yes," Victoria replied, "and I hope you are Captain Compton — and Mrs. Compton."

It appeared that this also was a good guess, and the captain continued kindly, — "Is thee looking for mayflowers?"

"Ah," returned Victoria, shrinking, "I have n't the use of my hands. I can't gather them."

The captain looked down with a sympathy which even Victoria did not repel.

"We must send our grandson to bring thee some," he said.

"I made the acquaintance of Ferdinand this very morning," said Victoria. "If he would only have the kindness to invite me to go with him after mayflowers!"

"He 'll be much pleased to," said the captain, and he looked pleased himself, but his wife showed no such symptom.

Victoria perceived that she had not reached a source of information regarding the voice, and she hesitated to reveal the secret of the guitar to this unsympathetic woman.

Not to keep them waiting longer, she

stepped back then, and said, "I shall watch for the invitation."

The captain nodded, smiling, and said, "Farewell;" there was a low, subterranean rumble from his wife, and the old horse jogged on. Victoria, calling the general, who was off sniffing at rabbit tracks, went slowly and wearily home to her dinner.

During this repast, she gradually drew from Susannah Green that Ferdinand's father, having gone to Callao as supercargo, at the age of twenty-two, had then done considerable justice to what is called the folly of youth. In a state of bewilderment (Susannah affirmed) the Quaker-bred youth had married and brought home a pretty Spanish girl of Lima, and in a few years had taken her back to die, leaving Ferdinand ever since at his grandfather's.

Victoria received the impression that there was a severe stricture upon the boy's impulses from his Quaker environment,

which was tightened more and more by the resolution of his grandmother to exterminate his mother's traits of character. But Captain Compton loved some of these traits, and loved the boy with unspeakable fondness. It was this love which had kept the finely-strung child alive. It gave something for the lonesome heart to cling to; a comrade and confidant; a sharer of every interest in life.

The next day Ferdinand appeared with shining morning face and his invitation. He came in, at Victoria's request, and sat holding his cap in his slender hand with Quaker quiet, and a worldly politeness which he had learned from his mother. His dark eyes flashed Spanish vehemence with very little provocation.

He knew a place where there would be plenty of mayflowers by Saturday. It was on the lee shore of Abram's pond, where the sun shone all day, and he would row Victoria over in a new boat named the

Siren. Would Victoria please to tell him what that name meant?

"The sirens," said Victoria, "were fabulous creatures that sat on the shore, and sang so sweetly that people on the sea, who heard them, were tempted to steer in their direction. I heard one in the woods yesterday."

"Thee did?" exclaimed Ferdinand, his eyes dilating. "I wish I 'd been there!"

"Have you any idea who could sing with such a remarkable voice?" Victoria asked.

"Remarkable? No," Ferdinand responded with eager curiosity. "What kind of a voice was it?"

"A woman's, — a very young woman's, apparently; perfectly natural and incorrect, but as charming as it could be."

"N—o, I don't know," said Ferdinand thoughtfully.

It was plain that he had no suspicion who the singer might have been.

Victoria considered whether she had best

tell him of her experience in the old house, and of the guitar.

But she was sensitive about her helplessness, and shrank from any allusion to it, and the guitar was somebody's secret.

When Ferdinand departed, it was agreed that Victoria should be driven over and meet him at the place where the boat was moored, at nine o'clock on Saturday morning.

A few hours later Victoria pushed aside her book, the leaves of which she needed somebody to cut for her. It oppressed her to be always requiring help in the most trifling matters, and besides, as she had been accustomed to give all her thought to music, she had not acquired an interest in other literature.

She turned listlessly to her window, and surveyed the colorless scene; a sandy road, stretching away to nowhere in particular, and a lonely wilderness of pines in which it lost itself at the foot of the hill. Two or three old story-and-a-half houses sat dozing

at intervals of an eighth or half a mile. No plenitude of sunshine could make this a bright scene to Victoria.

She paced the room like a weary and reduced young lioness, caged. But her eyes lighted, at length, with a ray of hope.

"There is, however, an interest here somewhere," she said, "either a natural or supernatural wonder to be investigated. What if there should be somebody hidden, buried here, apparently fated to die with all her music in her, and I could discover her, as somebody discovered Nilsson, and point out a career to her, and help her on in it!"

It was the first time that Victoria had ever thought with interest of any career but her own, and she was rather pleased with the fancy.

Every morning her first reflection upon awakening had been the discouraging one that she was doing nothing. Her first sensation was a sinking of heart, for in spite of all her brave resolves she did not know

what to do. She wished to make some stupendous move, yet the only moves she made were as useless as they were tiresome. She walked about in the same dusty, dreary ways, that led to nowhere. It was impossible to enter the lives of the reticent, self-reliant people by whom she was surrounded. It was more than could be expected of nature for her to be deeply interested in anything that had not some relation to music; and music, to them, was simply an unaccustomed noise, to which a few listened with amiable allowance, provided it was not continued too long, and the remainder abhorred as a device of Satan.

By Saturday morning, her interest in the excursion after arbutus had died out, and she had ceased to anticipate the sail across the lovely lake, for that also led to nowhere. She was weary, not only of her helpless self, but of everything she saw, as she was driven over to the landing place.

Ferdinand had not arrived. She had

come too soon, in her impatience to be moving, to be doing something, however useless.

Yet there were the oars and his basket and an extra pea jacket in the boat. She paced the shore and waited, watching even the dear old general's delighted dashes into the water with ennui.

Her ennui took a sudden leap into keen alertness, however, for unmistakably the same rich, honeyed voice she had pursued was again lifted up in the distance. This time she stood fixed, fearing to repel it by pursuit, every fibre tense with the eagerness of listening, and the dread of losing. The sounds were approaching. She was glad, — gladder with every note. She would keep very quiet, like a cat watching for a mouse, and the instant it was near enough, she would pounce upon it. At length it was so near that she felt sure she could make a successful dash. The general barked, and the singing ceased.

For the first time Victoria was unkind to her faithful friend.

In desperation she hurried alongshore, looking deep into the wood, and up the wood-path that met the road over which she had come.

She heard footsteps. They came running. Victoria stood wide-eyed with lips parted. She could see a moving figure through the intervening thicket. It came fully out, and her hope expired, for it was only Ferdinand; but under his arm he was bringing — yes, it was the guitar she had seen in the old exile's cupboard! He moved more slowly, and reciprocated Victoria's stare of surprise. He had an air of humbly regretting some obnoxious act.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SIREN IN PROPRIA PERSONA.

THE surprise of seeing the guitar in Ferdinand's hands was less than the disappointment of having lost sight of the mysterious singer again. Overlooking the boy's confusion, Victoria called excitedly, "Who was that? Did you see anybody?"

"Where?" Ferdinand exclaimed, checking himself with puzzled gravity.

"Why, over there, somewhere. You heard it this time, Ferdinand."

"Heard what?" with increased perplexity.

"That singing."

"That woman's? That siren's?"

Victoria made a gesture of impatience. "*Who was it? Where was it?*" she demanded in a corresponding tone.

Ferdinand mused. "Does thee mean" — he began. "Thee don't mean" — he began again, and then he stopped altogether.

"*I mean to ask who was singing three minutes ago!*"

Up to the very rim of Ferdinand's hat there mounted a scarlet blush. "It was — it was me!" he said faintly.

"*You!*" exclaimed Victoria, half scornfully, and very skeptically.

She began to suspect that he was one of those ruthless boys who exult in teasing. This view was not supported by the gentle suffused face, in which various expressions struggled with each other, without giving one evidence against him.

Then Victoria thought of some famous boy soprani, and her heart leaped up.

"Let me hear you sing 'Casta Diva,' then!" she said.

"I don't know the names of some things I sing, — nor the words," said Ferdinand meekly.

"Where did you learn them?"

"I heard my mother sing them, — and you, — and the birds."

"Go on with the same that I have just heard," said Victoria with a mixture of eagerness and fearfulness.

"It's partly made up, for I can't remember just how my mother sang it," said Ferdinand.

"Well, sing, sing, sing!"

The boy stood perfectly still, with his guitar pressed to his side, and throwing back his head a little, fixed his splendid Spanish eyes upon something far away, and lifted up his enchanting voice.

Without words, the meaning was all in his feeling.

But his "La-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah-ah, La-ah-ah-ah-ah," originally applied to the worship of the moon, was full of a young enthusiast's worship of something better than the moon, — some vague ideal of his boyish soul.

Victoria drank the sounds with rapture.

There are nectar and ambrosia for the ear, as well as for the palate. When he had finished and, glancing timidly at her, cast his eyes down again, as if ashamed, she ran to him with outstretched arms. "My little Ferdinand," she cried, "you 're richer than a king, for you 've got them both, — the body and the soul!"

Ferdinand was thrown into absolute stupefaction by the surprise of such a demonstration. He went his way hurriedly and almost in silence to the boat. One of the earliest words he had learned to speak had been "gracias." He had never dropped it in becoming a New England boy. In his confusion he simply murmured "Gracias! Gracias!" But Victoria had never talked so much nor so earnestly to any person in her life, nor felt so much interest and affection. She had never had time to talk and be interested, and nothing had touched her affections. There had been no room for people in her world.

Resting her arm on Ferdinand's shoulder, she stepped lightly down into the little skiff. The general followed, touching the unsteady foothold gingerly, and seated himself amidships with a dubious, watchful air, but allowed himself to be pushed farther and still farther on until he looked out like a figure-head from the prow.

Ferdinand's guitar, almost forgotten, came forward with all its prestige at length. "That," said Victoria, when he had placed it carefully under the seat, and after pushing off, had shipped his oars, and was beginning to pull out, "that is the mysterious guitar that I saw in the cupboard of the old exile."

Ferdinand looked up with a start, crabbed an oar, and muttered "Caspita!" for under excitement he often recalled almost forgotten ejaculations.

"Do you mind telling me why you keep it in such an inconvenient place?" asked Victoria.

"I put it there to hide it."

"Why hide it?"

"It was my mother's," said Ferdinand in an extremely grave and confidential tone, as he rested on his oars, "and grandmother thought she ought to burn it; but grandfather said no, and he put it away somewhere. One day I prayed him to let me have it, and he went out to the corn-crib and got it, and said 'Now thee take care, Ferd'nand! *Take care!*' I knew what he meant, so I tried to think of some place where I could keep it safe, and where nobody could hear it when I played. I thought of the old house. Boys don't like to go there. They 're afraid of the exile's ghost, and there is n't anything to go for, either, — *unless we 've got something to hide*," he added with a roguish smile. "Grandfather used to come over there to hear me sing. Sometimes we took the guitar down on the cliff. Grandfather liked that best, the sea and the guitar and the

singing all together. We thought the guitar was safe in that cupboard, but now I don't know what to do with it. Somebody else might go there."

"Let me take care of it, Ferdinand," said Victoria, "and unless you 're too much of a bungler (I could n't endure that) we 'll take it with us when we go on our little excursions, for we shall have more."

It was not at once that he could be made to understand that he was something extraordinary. "Why, everybody hates to hear me and my guitar, except thee and grandfather," he said. "I don't dare to make a sound until I get into the woods."

She told him of Bach, whose brother placed obstacles in the way of his study, and with what difficulty he got MSS. of music and copied them by moonlight. She told him of her imprisonment in the old house, of the discovery of the guitar, and her fruitless chase after the siren voice, all of which intensely pleased Ferdinand.

"Now let us float for a while," she said at length. "Pull in your oars, and let me hear you touch the light guitar, Ferdinand. Let's see, now, what you can manage to do with your fingers."

Ferdinand, the happiest boy in the world, laid down his oars, and brought out his treasure, which had tinkled to the touch of impassioned fingers when the moon was full in Cuba, Peru, and who knows where else? His hand trembled a little for fear he should "be a bungler," as he caressed the strings with a few light strums, which made the general nestle uneasily. Then, with a bolder hand, he twanged away with a sure, instinctive touch, while he sang a Spanish serenade; then an old cavalier song; then an Ave Maria; the general putting in an occasional irrepressible note, which died into whimpering mumbles when Victoria looked at him.

She found nothing objectionable in the tones of the guitar, and Ferdinand's delicacy of feeling and accuracy of ear and touch

were wonderful. As she watched the water ripple and glide by, she planned that he was to be a musician of no common order. With such musical instinct and facility, his future seemed clearly pointed out.

"But, Ferdinand," she said, "where did you get such a voice? Were there singers among your people?"

"Oh, yes, indeed!" Ferdinand rejoiced to say. "My large grandmother was a beautiful singer."

"Large? Perhaps you mean great."

"But is n't large, great?"

"Not when we 're speaking of grandmothers. You should say great grandmother."

"My mother said 'bisabuela,' but she wished me to say — I suppose it was great grandmother, then. She wished me to speak like my father. Vaya; my great grandmother came from Italy. She sang all over the world, and when she went to Lima to sing, she married my great grandfather.

Then I had another grandfather who lived in Cuba. This was his guitar. He used to sing to it. He sang that song I have just sung, — the first one, — sang it under my grandmother's bedroom window, and she threw him down a rose, and after he was married to her, he had a rose marked on everything. See, here 's one on this guitar." And, sure enough, on the back of the guitar was the faint and faded symbol of that old love story.

" What a blossom of romance you are, Ferdinand," said Victoria. " Italy, Spain, Cuba; why, you followed the direction of Christopher Columbus in coming to us."

With his brightest blush and softest accent, Ferdinand answered (for he knew some history), " Por cierto, and here I have gone and discovered more of a world than I was looking for, too. But I have n't died without knowing it," he added, with a beatific sigh.

So the excursion after arbutus became a

long, friendly, happy conference; but there was some arbutus gathered, too, on the shore of Abram's Pond, to garnish this festival of youth and spring. Sunny meadows stretched away beyond the tangled fringe which bordered the pond, and bright little clouds sailed high above them. A willow trailed its green mist upon them, while they ate their luncheon in the boat. The meadow lark, that seemed to be always where Ferdinand was, piped his sweetest variations, and Ferdinand returned them in notes that were even more divine.

CHAPTER V.

SINGING TO THE CAPTAIN.

"He is the most remarkable person this little village has ever seen."

"*Ferd'nand Compton?*"

"To be sure. If they had him in some of the great churches, they'd be proud of him, and thousands of people would go to hear him."

"Hear him what?"

"Why, hear him sing. There is n't such a voice as his in the nation; perhaps not in the world."

Rhoda stared at her visitor with a sort of hysterical expression; her smile utterly thwarted by a distrustful little twist of her mouth, which seemed to scout this wild view more than the most derisive laugh could

have done. She got up, went to the cupboard beside the chimney, took down a bottle, poured some of its contents into an old-fashioned wine-glass, cut in a fan-shaped pattern, and offered it to Victoria.

"What is that?" Victoria asked with a gesture of withdrawal.

"It 's quietin'; drink it, do!" pleaded Rhoda.

"Thank you very much, but I don't want to be quiet. I want to feel exactly as I do," said Victoria, "so pour that precious bumper back into its bottle, and keep it. It may be needed."

Rhoda slowly and reluctantly set the glass on the table, and returning to her rocking-chair listened to more of this visionary talk, with her hands clasped patiently in her lap, and her sewing lying neglected on the floor where it had dropped, to the delighted surprise of the yellow cat, who directly accepted it as a bed.

"He must have lessons," continued Vic-

toria. "I must begin with him at once. But Mrs. Compton would not allow the lessons in her house, and I 'm afraid it would be quite as impossible at Nathan Greene's."

She waited, hoping Rhoda would propose something, but Rhoda only continued to grapple with these strange ideas in silence. Victoria's enthusiasm was not to be easily suppressed, however.

"Well, there 's the whole country outside of houses," she said. "Ferdinand is going to have lessons, and then, — ah, what a surprise he will be to the city people! New York will, perhaps, have a sensation."

"He has n't even surprised this little village yet," said Rhoda.

Victoria felt as if she had gone back to an age where mankind achieved its highest aims through implements of stone, and there, among the stones, had found a gem, — worthless, contemptible in the Paleolithic view. Her only solicitude was how to get possession of it, that she might have

it cut and polished, and bring it before the covetous eyes that would know it for a gem.

Rhoda did not invite her to make use of the schoolroom, as she had hoped, and Victoria, with her firm chin poised a little too high, went away so suddenly, but with so much polite ceremony, as to leave Rhoda bewildered, and a good deal below her usual point of contentment.

Though not in sympathy with many of Victoria's ideas, not being able to understand them, Rhoda was heartily in sympathy with the girl herself, and that feeling, together with pity for Ferdinand, determined her state of mind for many days. She began to have twinges of self-reproach, when she saw them hurrying away to their alfresco lessons. "Poor Vic*t*ory! Poor Ferd'nand!" she murmured to herself many times.

One day, Victoria, trying to carry an umbrella and waterproof cloak, stopped at

the schoolroom door for her pupil, and Rhoda melted into a gentle river of compassion.

"Where 's thee going with that umbrella?" she asked.

"Over to the exile's cottage," Victoria answered. "Do you think it will rain?"

"Yes, I do think it will rain," Rhoda declared, and while she said it she took the umbrella and cloak and Victoria's hat and jacket, and hung them all up in the little side entry.

"There! thee do thy teaching in the schoolroom, now and always," she said in conclusion.

To a person reading this page, that would seem an unimportant act, but an act is only important in view of its consequences. Rhoda felt that she was taking a momentous step.

Ferdinand learned more and more of Victoria's technique, and improved surprisingly, but while he was about it, numer-

ous Quaker hats and bonnets stood still in front of Rhoda's house, and much wonder and speculation went on beneath them; for besides Ferdinand's voice, the guitar frequently sent out a shower of tones inexplicable to the Friendly ear. Rhoda had a call of inquiry. There was expostulation. Then she was "dealt with" by the Meeting, and maintained that "where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty." The Meeting was too small to spare a member, even one who ventured upon such bold interpretations, so there the matter dropped, save as it became a ground for individual bitterness of feeling.

But, having espoused a cause, Rhoda was ready to live for it, let die who would. Nothing is nearer or dearer than the things we have obstinately championed through difficulty with success. Thenceforward Rhoda was like a hen with two chickens. She ruffled herself at every suspicion of unfriendly approach.

Captain Compton knew all these happenings, generally from the scandalized Hannah's report, but especially from his confidential chats with Ferdinand. He longed to be nearer, within the immediate circle of these new joys; to shut his eyes and hear the singing; to open them and see the earnest, hopeful young faces. He longed in silence.

But one warm evening in May, his couch was drawn up before the window from which could be seen his little piece of beloved ocean. Against the wall of the room hung a picture of his good ship, Nancy Nye. In a corner, on an old mahogany stand with twisted legs, lay his compass and a sandalwood work-box, which he had brought home to his first wife. The chimney-piece was garnished with shells and coral and other relics of savage islands. Hannah's care of the captain was constant. Perhaps she wearied him a little, for he was very weak. When he coughed, she offered him

his nauseating drops. If he coughed again, she closed the door, for fear of a draught. She covered him more closely from the evening air, which seemed to him grateful and refreshing. She brushed back his fine, thin, faded brown hair; she asked him if he was comfortable now, and she thought he had better have a glass of wine. When he had submitted to that, she sat slowly rocking in a squeaky chair by his side. She heard him sigh, as the shadows gathered on the distant sea.

"Is there anything I could get for thee, dear, — anything thee 'd like that thee has n't got?" she asked.

The tired eyes looked up hopefully.

"If they could come and sing to me!" he said.

Hannah set her lips firmly. There was a terrible pull against her strong will, but the captain's wistful eyes were upon her. Let a dying man ask what he will! And to tell the whole truth, Hannah never ceased to

be grateful to the captain for marrying her, — a poor and elderly spinster.

"When would thee like to have 'em come?" she said at last.

"Every day, about this time," was the unexpectedly large request.

Hannah agreed to submit to this arrangement, and then set her chair slowly rocking and squeaking again. There was no other sound until the captain spoke. "I must n't trouble thee too much with my whims, wife," he said. "I shall soon have the satisfactions of the better world. I ought to be more contented."

"But is n't there anything thee 'd like to take with thee, Sam'wel, to the better world, if thee could?" asked Hannah affectionately.

"Yes, wife, yes, — one thing," the captain answered with his gentle sigh.

"What 's that, dear?"

"*The Atlantic Ocean!*" the old sailor murmured, turning his face to the window.

It was for this weary, wishful soul that

Victoria sang again, — without thought of technique, without hope of a career, — though she had recoiled painfully from the proposal. But she could not, at length, deny the patient, dying man, and she forgot herself at sight of him.

The evening upon which she and Ferdinand made their first appearance before this grateful audience of one was a momentous occasion. To be able to "sing out loud" in the house, as Ferdinand expressed it, was a freedom beyond all bounds of wildest hope. His pride and joy would have been something calling for trumpets and drums, but that he began to feel the shadow which coming sorrow cast before. His cheeks looked hot, and his eyes very large when he came to the open door to welcome Victoria. Hannah Compton, though she could not forbid the singing, did not give countenance to the little concert by her presence.

Victoria found the captain lying calmly in the sunset light, that struck across the

plain, old-fashioned room, lighting up the picture of the Nancy Nye, after having left a rosy glow upon his piece of sea. She gave him her diminished hand, now healed, but always gloved, and beginning to be useful to her again.

"Bless thee for coming, my child," said the captain, his glad face beautifully reflecting the evening glow; and still holding the poor hand, with a wistful upward look he added, "It 's a wonderful comforting thing, is a singing voice. I 've never had enough of those things. Maybe thee 'd be willing to come often, — for a while?"

He had such a yearning look that Victoria said promptly, "As often as you wish, dear sir." And she said it sincerely. "But, in your long voyages, and in Quakerville," she continued, "I don't see how you really ever got any singing."

"Sit here, if thee will," said the captain. "Thee won't like that chair, it groans so. My men used to sing," he answered, when

Victoria was placed in a low, black, hair-cloth chair, introduced from the shrouded parlor. "I liked to hear their shanties, when they were hauling in the bowline, or tautening up the tacks and the sheets; but there was once a young man among my crew who had been to a college, and was dismissed for something wrong he had done, and sent to sea for discipline. He could sing as sweet as a woman. Ah, my child, it 's a woman's singing voice we crave to hear. That pleasure has seldom come to me; though once, in Martinique" —

He paused, and mused a moment, with reminiscence in his eyes, and then continued, as if resolving to drop the subject of Martinique. "This young man — Jamie, we called him — made me feel as if I 'd done something just right, some time or other, and he 'd been sent as a reward o' merit. But he was n't a bit sure to do right himself. Poor Jim! One part of him seemed to want to be an angel, and the other part

was bound to be a brute. But the angel got the best of it. My men were all gentler that voyage, as if there 'd been a lady aboard. [Much of Jamie's gentleness had been caught and assimilated from Captain Compton himself. Before the cabin-boy had learned to love and respect his captain he had been a universal terror.] They caught his songs, and on warm evenings, when there was a moon, and we were running smooth, with the wind humming softly in the sails, and the foam curling up under the bow, they used to sing ' 'T was off the blue Canary Isles, I smoked my last cigar.' I never smoked a cigar myself, — never thought 't was a sensible thing to do, — but that song used to — used to " —

" Used to make thee cry? " Ferdinand suggested, creeping closer and slipping his smooth brown fingers into the captain's wasted, bony hand.

" No, oh no, not quite; but it did make me heave a sigh," the captain allowed. " I

guess 't was being the last of something, that touched me, — that, and the soft way they sang it. I only sensed the blue Canary Isles, and the last of something hard to part with. There 's a pain goes with the last time." He turned his face to the window, and kept silence. "And there shall be no more sea," he murmured presently. "It may be that 's a comfort to some people. *No — more — sea!*" His voice died.

"Oh," said Victoria, compassionately, "those things almost always have a meaning entirely different from what you 'd naturally think. I 'm sure, if it was studied into, it would be found to have another rendering, like this: 'There shall be *much* more sea;' or, 'There shall be *ever* more sea.' There 's something said about a sea of glass, you know."

The captain's lips almost fell into lines of dreariness and dismay, but he kept them as steadily serene as he could and said, "Thank thee. Speaking of 'the last time,' — the

last song I ever heard Jim sing was when we sighted Cape Cod, at the end of the voyage. He struck up 'My country, 'tis of thee,' and all the sailors joined in. When we came ashore, we found there 'd a war broken out. Jamie joined the troops that had just been called for from Washington."

"Where is he now?" asked Ferdinand.

"The poor part of him is under some battlefield, I suppose," said the captain, "but the other part must be making people happier — yes, and better — somewhere. There was another song I used to like to hear him sing — 'Oft in the stilly night.' Could thee sing that?"

"But is n't it rather mournful?"

"That 's the kind grandfather likes," Ferdinand declared, and the captain was, in truth, an example in proof that "Man was not made for joy alone." "La tristesse" made "also part of his great want."

And so, as the shadows fell, Victoria sang that sweetest song of regret, and after it

some songs of the sea, of the evening, and of hope. Ferdinand, in addition to his own especial répertoire, soon caught the new ones, and sang with her. His sadness gave unconscious pathos to his voice, a new effect of exquisiteness.

That contact with the dying was new and strange — was sometimes overwhelming — to Victoria. Partly from an earnest longing — quite as new, and quite as strange — to lighten the way in which the good captain was so wearily going, and partly from direct contagion of Ferdinand's intense spirit, there came to her a warmth, a self-abandon, a heavenly touch, which had never graced her larger, prouder overtures. She saw the captain's face light up with a wondering gladness that covered all trace of weariness and pain, and the wasted hand go often to the closed eyes to brush away the welling-up of a deep fountain.

Night after night they continued to sing to the captain, and sometimes he would be

full of the light of other days, and tell tales of his life on far-away seas, and give little sketches, like the sketch of Jamie, of persons who had made inroads upon his soft heart. But he never said more of Martinique. Each night they had moved on, nearer to the shore of the great, strange ocean upon which he was to take a long voyage.

At length came a night when he could only whisper to them to sing once more. But Ferdinand could not. Even that had gone from him. He could only cling fast to the chilling hand with a face almost as white as that of the dying. And Hannah Compton was there. It seemed as if even she might understand how it had been possible for the suffering man to be buoyed up, carried gently through, upon blessed waves of heartful sound.

As Victoria raised her voice in the solemn stillness for the last time, it seemed not the same which had faithfully practiced the

artificial prayers and plaints of Marguerite, of Elsa. It borrowed an exquisite tenderness, a genuine tremulo from real and present sorrow. She sang a song of peace for a sailor about to set forth upon the sea; a song of hope and loving consignment; and when she had finished, the old seaman had sailed smoothly out.

CHAPTER VI.

FOR FERDINAND.

Ferdinand Compton paid the usual price for his exquisite nature, — that of a large capacity for pain.

And Hannah Compton, having resolved to show her regard for her dead husband by doing her duty towards his grandson, complicated the boy's misfortune; for the duty of some is the calamity of others.

Ferdinand fell into that condition of suffering which can only be defined as home-sickness. Without the usual signs of excessive grief, he pined and faded with the cool, dutiful, unloving eyes of Hannah Compton always upon him, considering what might be done to make him altogether different from what he was.

There was no more singing for him. He could not sing. "It hurts me," he confessed to Victoria.

It was the summer vacation; but, after certain regular duties that his grandmother imposed upon him had been performed, he sat in the darkened keeping-room, where there was not even a fly to remind him of living things, with Wagstaff's "History of the Friends" on his lap, the preface to which, in charging the Society with ignorance of its own annals, adds, "especially the youth, who deem it a severe task, instead of a pleasure, to ponder over its pages."

This passage Ferdinand's grandmother had pointed out to him, and he was supposed to be reflecting upon the troublous experiences of long-departed Quakers, when, in fact, he was dying of his own. His æolian harp had vanished, and he expected never to touch his guitar again. With morbid, unboylike grief, he slipped out of his bed on wakeful nights, and stole down

stairs to sit in his grandfather's chair, and resting his hot cheek upon the cool window-sill, watch the glimmer of the moon on grandfather's sea. This comforted him, for it was freedom. It was the only time when Hannah Compton did not know where he was, and what he was doing. But such nights do not make blooming boys. The summer was wearing away, and so was Ferdinand.

"How can we save him? Help me think how to rescue him!" Victoria besought her friend, Rhoda Freeman.

"I 've thought of bringing him over here, away from that house," Rhoda replied.

"But will Mrs. Compton allow that?"

"He 's his father's boy, thee knows; I 've written to him," Rhoda quietly announced.

Victoria seldom kissed anybody; Friend Rhoda had hardly ever been kissed in her life. It was an event when the unsympathetic girl, going over from her seat by the window, arrested and embraced the prim

figure that was stepping evenly — five steps forward, and five back — between the cupboard and the tea-table.

The number of minutes of each day in which Victoria had contrived to gain the opportunity of comforting Ferdinand had been for that time the measure of her ambition. To invent some new cheer for him, some new plan for appeasing Hannah Compton's mistaken zeal, were the matters which occupied her. The smile which Ferdinand gave her when she came with something new to show him, or to tell him, — some story, perhaps, of temporary misfortune to another boy, which ended happily, — produced in her a thankful sensation of success.

Unconscious of disapproval, in a house where she had sung so much, she ransacked her memory for sweet songs, and crooned them softly to him, as a mother comforts her sick child. And so she kept him on the line of safety until Rhoda's answer from his father came.

It was the message of a man wrecked in fortune and in health. One could almost hear him groan with the despair of his disabilities. He hoped (as usual) to come soon to his child, but what would be the boy's fate if that should be forever impossible? This question apparently wrung the father's heart.

When Victoria had read this, she mused over it, and then sat down to Friend Rhoda's desk, and wrote another word to Ferdinand's father. If the answer to it should be consent, she would need to double the work of past years, to accept unmixed toil without the support of her ambitious hope. Still, when it was written, it went on its way to South America.

At nearly the same time with Rhoda's letter, there had come another from Ferdinand's father to Hannah Compton, asking that Ferdinand might be placed at Friend Rhoda's for care, keeping, and tuition, until he should be able to come for him.

Captain Compton had left not much besides the home, and Hannah was to have the little all during her lifetime. Whatever she bestowed upon the boy was felt by her to be an overflowing benevolence.

There are few who will not resign an irksome duty when they can believe that they are providentially called to do so. It is uncertain which found the greater relief, Ferdinand or his grandmother, when it was settled, at length, that this listless, tiresome boy — as he seemed to Hannah — should fall to the lot of Rhoda Freeman.

As if some distinguished guest had been expected, the room designed for Ferdinand in Rhoda's house had been subjected to a great course of beautification, to which the sunshine added its gift of brightness, and the meadow-lark an unlimited delight, by having established a custom of more frequent and prolonged recitals from the top of the tall pine-tree in full view of the windows. Victoria's hands were almost as deft

as if they had never suffered. She brought out a store of ribbons with which she looped up, and tied back, and hung up, and fastened on things, until the room seemed to smile at its own prettiness. She sent away for a tinted print of the young David playing on his harp, with an upturned, radiant face; and another of a nut-brown Italian boy with laughing eyes, his hat set back from a rich chevelure of locks, a stiff red feather stuck in its band, his white teeth gleaming under a delighted smile, because of the vivacious performance of his little sister singing to the accompaniment of his violin. It was a perpetually charming story as well as a picture, and Victoria pinned it up where it would be a morning greeting to Ferdinand. In a bare corner she stood his guitar, also beribboned.

To these was added, on the morning when Ferdinand was coming, a jar of sweet peas from Rhoda's cherished flower garden.

It was on one of the mornings when the

fog blows away and leaves a clear, brisk air of reviving freshness, that Ferdinand was conducted to this room. His youth and his Italio-Spanish blood responded to its brightness. His old smile struggled out through the mask of sadness he had worn. There was a great commotion of mixed feelings. Victoria, perceiving what was coming, went over to where he sat, piteously bewildered by a gladness that made his heart swell much like the pain, and wrapped her kind arms about him. In response to this, he drooped his head upon her shoulder and burst into that abandon of weeping of which he had been long in need. He wept all his loneliness and sorrow to an end.

"Let 's have it thoroughly over," said Victoria, "for there 'll be no opportunity for tears in future, we 're going to be so glad. Understand, dear, from this minute you are my own little brother; the only brother ever given to me; the only human being that ever seemed to belong to me.

I 've written to ask your father to give you to me."

A soft fire shone in Ferdinand's uplifted eyes. He was too suddenly happy to speak.

"And you 're to call me sister, — always, — never anything else. You won't forget?"

"Oh, *n-o, ne-e-ver!*"

"Call me so now, then. No, *what?*"

"No, *sister!*" and the lonely little fellow clung to his lonely new relative with all his Spanish vehemence and his Quaker sincerity.

CHAPTER VII.

MAKING A NIGHT OF IT.

Time passed, and nothing was heard from the occult father of Ferdinand. Victoria, after watching and wondering long, sometimes thought the ship must have wrecked that carried her letter, or that Mr. Compton must have died. As for the boy himself, he had been so used to looking in vain towards his father, that all seemed as usual to him, except his new freedom, and the new interests of his life, the constant exchange of happy thoughts, the ever grateful satisfaction which being made much of is sure to impart.

Nobody seemed ready to claim Ferdinand, yet Victoria did not feel free to take him into the world in pursuit of his career,

though he was presently cut completely adrift from the old moorings, for Hannah Compton in a few weeks rented her house and went to take up her abode with her brother.

"He 's deserted, then, by his own family," said Victoria. "His grandmother washes her hands of him, and his father" —

Rhoda paused in her occupation of grating green corn for the dinner's pudding, and solemnly shook her head. "I begin to have an apprehension," said she, "that William Penn won't ever come back."

"Oh, he is dead," said Victoria. "I am convinced of that, after waiting months for some response to a request which any savage would have answered in some polite way or other. That letter to you was his dying groan. As a father, he was a failure. Let that be his epitaph. Now, Ferdinand is yours."

"I shall be very glad to keep him," said Friend Rhoda.

"But I don't mean that you shall keep him," Victoria answered. "I mean that you shall make a present of him to me."

Rhoda's eyes exclaimed, and her lips added, "Why, Victory, thee seems to have lost thy reason. What could thee do with that boy, — a young girl like thee, who has no easy task to take care of thyself? It would n't be right for me to favor it. And if his father should come, he might disapprove of it, too."

"Don't call up that feeble ghost of a father!" cried Victoria. "I will do everything under your guardianship, Friend Rhoda. If his father should reappear, we will tell him that somebody had to do something, and that we were the only ones who seemed to have sufficient interest and energy. Oh, I should give him a very bold answer! Now we are a free and independent people, and we must have an appropriate celebration."

She called at the bottom of the stairs to

Ferdinand, who, unaware of her presence in the house, was improving the morning hour before school-time by clinking away at his guitar. He came sweeping down upon joyous wings.

"I am almost sure," Victoria told him, "that there is to be some delightful music a few miles down the shore-road this evening. We are not invited to hear it, but as much of it as floats out into the public way belongs to whoever is there to catch it. I intend to be there with my family. We will take a downy pillow along, so that if Friend Rhoda wearies of pleasure she may have peaceful naps in a corner of the carryall, while Ferdinand and I listen and listen."

Ferdinand twittered and fluttered in his rapture. He could think of nothing so utterly delightful.

Friend Rhoda repressed herself as she listened to Victoria's exciting proposition. She seemed to be just beginning her own youth in her sympathy and numerous par-

ticipations with these young creatures. But she thought it fitting to conceal the sparkles of joy that mounted to her head, ready to leap out of her eyes, at the prospect of a drive in the cool evening, with the sea and some sights and sounds of uncommon animation ahead, after other people had gone sweltering to bed. It troubled her a little because she was beginning to wish for and expect more excitation than she had been accustomed to, so she demurely withdrew herself, and said she would see about it. But she knew, and Victoria and Ferdinand knew, that they would all go smiling and rejoicing down the shore-road that evening.

Victoria had already engaged Nathan Green's old horse and carryall, and as it was uncertain when they would return, Caleb had promised to take a nap on the lounge in the keeping-room, and put the horse up at whatever hour it might be.

Old Gideon did not require much driving. To keep straight on, and stop at the sound

of "whoa!" on the one side, and to *laissez faire* on the other, was the perfect understanding between the propelling and compelling powers.

At forty-five minutes past seven o'clock, when Victoria mounted to the front seat of the carryall and gave the word, the clever creature shambled off cheerfully, while Caleb stood peering after in the soft glow of the evening, his retreating chin retreating more than ever, his mouth ajar with the perpetual wonder which marked his contemplation of Victoria. "Ain't she sing'lar!" he murmured, by no means for the first time.

Thus also, in his own language, the general, when Caleb left him still seated by the roadside, piteously wondering why he was so frequently left behind. Upon all those evenings when Victoria had gone to sing to the captain, he had been requested to remain at home, because he could not be trusted to refrain from lifting up his own voice, out on the captain's porch. Now

that Ferdinand was having lessons every day, it was the same. The boy's high prolonged notes, and the tink-a-link, clinkerty-clink of that long-necked thing, whenever it had its back scratched, gave the general such a queer, unhappy feeling, that again and again he had forgotten and set up a high, prolonged note of his own, until he was excluded from all musical occasions, and these were much too frequent. The roadside near Nathan Green's house had come to be his regular post. There he forever waited, watching the passing, meantime. Nobody had yet passed of any consequence. Nobody, as yet.

It was a hot night, — a night when corn grows. It was a blessing to be out under the stars, and catch the refreshment of a breeze which brought from the dim wood odors of balsams, which the scorching sun had drawn out. And there was a scent of wilted wild things along the way. Victoria said to herself, "No wonder a gypsy pines upon being housed."

What Rhoda was saying to herself at about the same time, as she prepared to put on her bonnet instead of her night-cap, was that she believed she was getting weak-minded, letting those children do with her whatsoever they pleased.

"Out ridin' in the night-time!" she murmured, with an effort at self-reproach. But when Gideon ceased his plodding in front of her door step, there were two eager child-like faces looking out of her window, one as full of the joy of departure as the other.

"I also invite the guitar," said Victoria, when Ferdinand appeared. "It ought to be present at the celebration." And Ferdinand, needing no explanation for that, save his own fondness, soon returned with the fourth member of the party in his embrace, and all together they plunged into the sweetness of the evening, — Rhoda dumb with contentment, Victoria and Ferdinand looking out upon earth and heaven as upon a piece of work which they graciously ap-

proved. As the stars came out, they faced infinity without the slightest feeling of impertinence; with even a vague sense of correlation and compatibility.

"I hear the sirens," said Ferdinand, in the fashion of boys, who harp upon a good joke. This was when they passed the shallow pools where the frogs were shouting their "Jug o' rum!" "Knee deep! Knee deep!" "Better go round!" and bumping in with cool-sounding splashes when they felt the jar of the carry-all.

"Don't talk," said Victoria. "Take care of your voice. I 'll talk to you."

So she told him about the North Star, and the Guardians of the Pole, and showed him the Wain, — as she liked to call it, instead of the Dipper, — and Jack-by-the-middle-horse. Ferdinand stretched his neck and turned his face upward. Rhoda stretched her neck, too. What! were there horses and Jacks in the heavens? This was less amazing, however, than it would have been

some months ago, before the discovery of an extraordinary boy in Quakerville. One marvel opens the mind to another.

There was a prolonged silence, during which the darkness of the woods was passed. The open plain expressed its want with simple candor. A gaunt apple-tree reached two imploring arms out over the wall, and all the trees shrank and retreated as they approached the shore, as if they feared the accusation of having run away.

Victoria felt a slight hand steal through her arm, and Ferdinand's shoulder lean against her. She knew that all else had faded from him; that she alone was essential. Joy glowed within her, surprising into quick awakening something of the rapture of tenderness which she might have felt at the touch of her own first-born. She pressed the little hand closer, and arm locked within arm, shoulder pressed to shoulder, they jogged on, still in silence, until at length they saw the lights of the villas and

cottages. There came a gentle puff of coolness from the south, and presently the whispering and sighing of a sentimental-looking sea, that caught evanishing gleams of a young moon just setting behind the summer barn of some city horses, back on the west road. A little farther on, some young people returning from a sail were strolling along in couples. There was a pretentious villa, with towers; some cottages, and a large hotel.

Victoria's eyes were fixed upon a low gabled roof that stood out against a background of dim sea and sky, a little to the right of the lighthouse spark. From gable to ground there was a flush of soft illumination. The house was doubtless full of guests, full of such gifts as Victoria coveted, for only rare talents were eligible to a place there. It seemed to have taken a position to exemplify this, for it stood higher, and far beyond all others.

Just as Gideon was clumping up the

rising ground which brought them to this exclusive spot, there stole out upon the still air the exquisite first notes of a string quintette. Ferdinand, who had never heard the like before, clasped Victoria's wrist with an inarticulate murmur. Then they were just opposite the wide-open house, and could see, within and without, quiet figures sitting or standing in listening attitudes. They did not seem to know or care that Nathan Green's old horse and carryall were passing.

Victoria drove by and stopped against the stone wall. They were at the musicale. And they were screened from being too much at it by a latticed and vine-covered pagoda on the lawn, in which a soft moon-like lamp was slowly swinging.

The master's summer home had an exorbitant air of simplicity, with careful touches of elegance, for having renounced the Bohemianism of his youth when he gained fame in the musical world as a master and com-

poser, he conceived that all his accompaniments ought to agree with his unobtrusive distinction.

"But, sister, we can't see!" Ferdinand complained, when the last sigh of the "Rhapsodie Hongroise" had died away, and his own rhapsodies a little subsided.

"Can't see what?"

"Why, can't see the people."

"We did not come to peep at the people," Victoria instructed.

Though somehow Rhoda, as well as Ferdinand, had expected to see something, she heartily agreed in Victoria's strictures, and perceived that it would be quite against good manners and a good conscience to turn her eyes towards those bright, pleasure-filled rooms. As there was not much that was clearly visible outside the carryall, and under the heavens, except the glow of the lighthouse flame, upon which she might lawfully and politely look, she leaned back comfortably against her pillow, and fixed

her eyes upon that. This was at nine o'clock, — Rhoda's bedtime. There was an interval of waiting for more music, during which she heard the familiar, tranquillizing sounds of Victoria's and Ferdinand's low voices, and felt the soothing of the bland air, which wavered like the fanning of drowsy wings between warmth and coolness. She was not sure where she was, but had an impression of trying to snuff her candle, which stood a mile or two away. Rondo, cavatina, bravura, simple song and swelling chorus, swept over her unheard and unheeded. The boy and girl, their arms linked, their dusky brown and sunny brown heads leaned together, made frequent annotations to the music by way of an arm pressed closer, or of eyes that exchanged sympathetic glances, or, on the part of the boy, of irrepressible interjections. It was as much as Victoria could do to restrain her volatile brother from bursting into essays at repetition, when the marvelous strains were

done. How would the hearts of the singers have been touched, perhaps, if they had known of that thrilling, throbbing audience, out beyond the wall!

There were rare old folk-songs, never heard in America before. Evidently, some of the singers had brought their songs with them from afar. But two young, flexible voices at length dispensed the fluent sweetness of the duet in the moonlight from the Barber of Seville. Victoria knew the girl's voice. She reached eagerly forward with a jealous pang, listening to those powers which had been preferred to her own.

"Ah," she sighed to herself, falling back against the side post of the carryall, "she feels it! That is Vario's voice, and she loves him. As for me — if that were needed — Heaven forbid!"

During the long interval of a supper, though Victoria seemed unusually quiet and thoughtful, she was really in a great flutter of intention. It was quite time she should

turn homeward, — long past the time, — but nothing could have been further from her purpose. Ferdinand was softly humming to himself passages that haunted his memory. He leaned his head upon her shoulder, and still humming slipped away into sleep. The night had been a balmy sea, bearing on its bosom bright islands of sound, at which two stray little barks touched for supplies of sweetness and joy. Having reached the outermost, they were very far at sea indeed.

It had long ceased to be of any use to address Friend Rhoda. She was having a good night's sleep. Gideon had never roused from his dozings, except now and then to shake off an imaginary mosquito, or change the foot on which he leaned. Charles's Wain was riding low, directly over the master's chimney. Victoria did not care.

At length the supper seemed to be finished. There were sounds of movement,

and of voices that wandered to and fro in broken, desultory chat.

"Ferdinand! Ferdinand!" called Victoria.

"Yes, sister, yes. Ah, I was wishing I could sing with such violins!"

"Are you quite awake?"

"Wh-y yes, of course. How could I be asleep?"

"Then take your guitar and go up before the great window, — not too near, — and sing 'Hark, hark, the lark!' Sing it just the very best you can. Will you?"

Ferdinand, refreshed by his nap, was very expansively awake indeed. He leaped to obey. It was the one thing needed to complete his bliss. Friend Rhoda felt something interfering with her feet. She started with an ejaculation of terror, to find herself camping out like a gypsy; and it was Ferdinand getting his guitar that thumped her ankles, so regardless of their reserve.

"We ought to be starting for home, Victory," she said. "It was late when we set out, thee knows."

"In a few minutes, Friend Rhoda. Let us see what Ferdinand will do."

The boy flitted up the graveled avenue like a sprite, his guitar pressed to his side, and poising himself with the lightness of elation just within the distance that a bird would venture, poured out the melodious announcement: —

"Hark, hark, the lark at heaven's gate sings."

No bird of the morning ever thrilled the air with a burst of purer joy. There was something startling in the suddenness, the spontaneity, of the clear, sweet notes. Nothing like it had been brought to the seemingly full measure of that choice night of music. Dead silence fell upon the warm rooms, where host and guests were privately rather weary. It might well have been that this sparkling rill fell upon them with reviving morning freshness.

It was supposed to be a clever surprise, contrived by the master of the house, and at the close of the short awakening song, there was enthusiastic applause. The guests moved to congratulate and thank the inventor of such a charming morceau of improvisation.

But the master had vanished. Outside, the rejected peri, looking up at the forbidden gate, saw him come forth and bear away Ferdinand. In another minute, Ferdinand, at any rate, was within. By and by she heard him singing his Spanish serenade; then in fascinating dance tempo, with the light pizzicato of the guitar, the air from Carmen, "Voglio danzar pel tuo piacer;" and then followed "Oh, joyous, happy day!" from the "Rose of Castile."

Clearly, he was receiving attention, and she fancied how naïvely he would respond to it. She could well guess how his beauty, his ardor, his simplicity, and his singular talents, the marvelous quality of his fresh

voice, would affect those tried proficients and connoisseurs. She herself sat entranced by the fancy. Her only thought was for Ferdinand. Every pulse beat for him. She had no concern for herself, until, after a long time of silence, during which she imagined Ferdinand feasting, surrounded by flatterers asking him curious questions, her heart gave a great leap. Suppose he should mention her! She had forgotten to charge him against that.

She heard footsteps on the gravel. Not the quick, running patter of Ferdinand's glad feet, but a man's firm, measured tramp. Perhaps it was the master! An overwhelming terror seized her. This was something not to be encountered. Having doomed her to be a drudging teacher of the piano, he would now find her so pitiably less, so sunken in misfortune, that his former sentence would seem a benediction if it could but be well executed.

With a frantic impulse, she sprang from

the carriage, and crouched under the wall on the farther side of the road, after gasping out the prayer "Speak to him, Friend Rhoda! Don't speak to me!"

It may be imagined that Friend Rhoda awaited with some consternation the approach of an unknown, fear-compelling man. She also was in much trepidation when he presented himself before her in the chary light that was three-fourths darkness. But he only assured her that he had many thanks to offer for the great pleasure.

"To whom belongs that boy?" he added.

"I have the charge of him while his father's gone," Friend Rhoda responded timidly.

"Do you know that he is a phenomenon?" (Friend Rhoda started.) "Where is that sister who teaches him to sing?"

"She — she ain't here just now," Friend Rhoda answered, confusedly struggling between her honesty and her desire to shield Victoria from — she knew not what.

"I must speak to her," the master declared.

"I 'm afraid thee can't. She 's stepped down the road a piece. I ain't sure as she means to come back at present."

The master promptly revealed himself as one who desired to bestow, rather than to crave, a favor.

"Is it wished to make use of the boy's voice?" he asked. "In such a case, it would be exceedingly well for him to come to me in New York, as I could direct him at once to make the most of it. Is it posseeble to bring him to New York? Who has aut'ority to answer that?"

A figure, half visible, stepped courageously out of the shadow, and a voice unknown to Friend Rhoda replied, "He shall come. I promise it, most gratefully."

"Ach! You are the sister?" The master moved towards the dim apparition. "And you are a teacher of singing. *No?*"

"Oh, no."

"But you are a singer?"

"No — no!"

"Yet you have taught your young brother very well. He has a seempatetic voice, — much as your speaking voice. He has had no other teacher?"

"No."

"You teach well, yet you are not a teacher, — nor a singer. Why?"

"I failed as a singer."

"So? Hm! There ees, however, something in your speaking voice which makes one regret that reply, Mees Camptone. Pardon, I am indebted to the brother for the name. I have not often heard a voice of that timbre, except from a throat that could sing. It would give me pleasure to speak at leisure with you in regard to your brother. Allow me to call upon you."

"I — I am truly sorry. We are most grateful, indeed, but I shall not be at home. My brother shall come to you, at any time you say."

The master hesitated with surprise. Then he continued, "There is want of his voice in some place known to me. He has much to offer, for his voice is a rare one; a boy soprano, but of the large species; and he sings with uncommon expression. But he will not give without equal return. My address is here, and after the 1st of October I have hope to see him."

Victoria took his card tremulously, murmuring more thanks, but she shrank away into the darkness again, startled by a light which flashed out suddenly.

A man approached from the house, bearing a brilliant little lantern and a tray. He was so black that he seemed featureless. His white vest and broad expanse of shirt-front gleamed alone in the concentrated light. There was a glitter of glass on his tray. His features evolved as he advanced to the carryall, and presented the tray with its sparkling freight to Friend Rhoda.

"Allow me to offer you refreshments,

ladees," said the master, making his retiring bow. "I pray your excuses, and wish you good-night."

As he returned somewhat slowly up the short drive, he thought less of the marvel of a boy who sang like a seraph down among the shy rustic Quakers, than he did of the unseen girl with a thrilling, tremulous voice, full of a singular earnestness and pathos, exquisite with an indescribable touch which haunted his sensitive ear.

The master paused. He meditated. He turned abruptly, determined to go back, to ask how she had failed, and why.

But no! what folly! The chances were fifty to one that he would meet with another disappointment. He had had too many already.

Victoria was left leaning against the wall. The bright little lantern stood on the front seat of the carryall, and the glittering tray upon Rhoda's lap. The raven of providence had retired. Rhoda was feasting

pleasurably upon the manna. Her appetite was good. She had always a healthful readiness for breakfast. She had waited and called impatiently and vainly for Victoria, who, having already tasted a heavenly manna, wished for nothing more, unless more of the same. It was as if the beloved object of her life had given her its first responsive smile.

And, yet, alas, that note of promise which the master had caught in her speaking voice, what was it but the accident of the moment?

"What has set all the roosters a-going?" Rhoda propounded, when Gideon, having joyfully turned his nose homeward, brought it to a point about which clustered a collection of rural homes, whose main dependence was their egg money.

"How plain I can see things!" she continued. "That cow, — she 's spotted black, and one of her horns is gone." As

they plunged into the woods again, she heard the first call (inflected like a question) of the wood-pewee, which sets up its note in the gray dusk, before the meadow lark and the robin are awake. "Vic*to*ry, it ain't *morning?*"

"I think it is," Victoria answered.

It was not after one week, nor yet two, that Rhoda recovered from the shock of finding that she had been out junketing all night. It seemed to her that she had done something disreputable, irretrievable, incalculable in its results, both moral and physical, least of which was the certainty of all having taken their deaths of cold. But Ferdinand asked how they could have colds, when the weather was so hot that the women at the musicale had their dresses cut off at the top, away down to *there*, and he gave an extravagant measurement which so increased the disreputableness of the whole aspect of things, that Rhoda felt more betrayed and abandoned then ever.

As to Caleb Green, when he awakened in the dawn to the sound of Gideon's step and the rattle of the old carryall, to find that he had slept on the lounge all night, it simply gave him one more occasion to say "Ain't she sing'lar!"

CHAPTER VIII.

BY THE AFTERNOON STAGE.

MEANTIME, a figure of vague contour had been set up in the imagination of a young man down in South America. It filled a shrine before which he ought to have paid his devotions, but his knees declined to bend.

On the veranda of an old stuccoed house, this man of varied misfortunes, which had left him pale and wasted of countenance and sorely pinched of pocket, sat staring at some highly feminine pages. These were Rhoda Freeman's letter to him, and Victoria's own anxious little inditement. He surveyed them until a crimson blush — much like Ferdinand's, except that it was not of timidity but of burning shame — suffused his hitherto listless face.

A self-dependent girl (so Rhoda spoke of her), with courage enough for herself, and so much to spare that she was ready to furnish his boy with a footing in the world! This, too, was the girl of whom his father had spoken with a blessing, in that last letter which he had been able to write. Wherever Penn should have ministered, this young woman had stepped in. Though he had not been ready to take up his duties, he was still less prepared to be thus relieved. The desire was almost fierce within him to rectify himself in the mind of that beneficent young person with the triumphant name.

Nobody would have recognized her in the figuration of Penn Compton's fancy. Victoria surely would not have recognized herself. The outlines were not flattering. Penn thought of her as large and patronizing, her largeness replete with supporting qualities. He wished to resist the tendency of these qualities towards his own province,

and clearly to illustrate an ability to dispense with them.

His dolors and difficulties of mind, body, and estate, had been real, and seemed insuperable, but these were now all forgotten under the new pressure of need, and the new incentive.

Penn rose up. He rose up with a purpose, and went. Everywhere the spur pressed and compelled him, and everywhere there was a dim figure in a repudiated shrine, at which he refused to offer his devotions. His face had the perpetual tenseness of one who is doing something under stress, with the fear — the appalling fear — of failure. For very fear and shame he sent no reply to the letter. What reply was possible? Could he accept the proffered patronage, or could he even decline to have his boy befriended? He was about to seize upon an alternative, and then —

Penn did not lack foundation for the renewing of his fortunes. He had abilities,

and he knew where these would be warmly welcomed.

An old college friend, — a Philadelphia journalist, — to whom he had written long letters from South America, and elsewhere, had frequently assured him that his strong point was a capability of furnishing very attractive copy, and he had urged Penn to come and set a stream flowing regularly into the yawning reservoir of his journal's daily needs. Penn thought of this at once, as the means to his end. There was no time to be lost.

His early experience of life had not pointed to heroic strokes. He had passed a quiet boyhood in Quakerville and at the Providence school; had graduated at the Quaker college at Haverford, and passed some time in England, with that flourishing and more important branch of the Compton family to whom the Inner Light had revealed the duty of staying at home, while his own branch, by the same leading, had

felt bound to come to America, to furnish the scathing propensities of the Puritans with a more tangible object than the abstract sin, or even the concrete devil, of theology. In the good days when Captain Compton was in his prime, and making great voyages, he had given his son — his only child — what he considered the best possible advantages.

From England, he had sent him to journey for a few months on the Continent, and having acquired a taste for traveling and seeing new lands, Penn finally went upon that voyage to Peru, which ended in his bringing home for a wife the pretty little Spanish girl whose chief aspiration was to see Paris; failing that, to see the United States of America. To her conception, these States were vast repositories of brilliant possibilities, which concentrated at New York, where she expected to fold her wings. Alas, they did not concentrate at all, in the little commercial town where Penn established him-

self in the counting-room of the ship-owners for whom his father had sailed for more than thirty years. There, unhampered, he might have come to be a well-to-do ship-owner himself. But the life of his little Spanish girl at length seemed to depend upon her breathing her native air, and from the moment he turned to retrace his course to South America, as if it had been a fatal region for him, the heavens frowned, and Penn progressed in misadventures, until he ended by sitting apathetically, day after day, upon the veranda of the old stuccoed house, where he was introduced.

Since then, since that arousing thrust at his pride, he has pushed a deadly battle of will against physical disability. His eyes have grown larger and brighter, and the tense look deepened and fixed.

It was by no means a temperate resolve to assert his independent manhood and fatherhood, or a temperate joy in the ability to present himself as one with some position

and means, that Penn set out at last for the village where he had ceased to be expected. He took especial care that no weak point in his personal presentment should indicate the incapacitated father. Even his irreproachable costume, his faithful and sufficient toilet, his very expression and bearing, were to take part in his vindication. It was with something like the instinct of self-defense that he prepared to make the meritorious and impressive figure which he was, as he paced the sidewalk of the small city where he was to take the stage for Quakerville. He may not have been of much consequence, but he looked as if he were. He had an inherited manner of quiet reserve and dignity. The tense look was softened by much satisfaction in the prospect of looking all his reassurance into the eyes of the patronizing Miss Montagu. The pallor of his countenance was hidden by the tawny hue which sun and wind had bestowed. His large, erect, and well set-up frame made successful

apology for his wasted flesh. His too-bright eyes seemed only to burn with a piercing earnestness. Nothing pitiable or pathetic was in the least recognizable upon this marked and much-observed figure as it waited for the stage.

At a "Boot and Shoe Store," on the principal street of the town, hung the slate which bore the passengers' orders to the driver, and there, when it suited their convenience, the passengers met their conveyance at its starting-post. Penn sauntered to and fro a few times, before the stage came rattling up with its smooth, ruddy-faced young driver, its starved-looking mail-bags, and its great budget of daily evening newspapers to be distributed to dwellers along the route. In approaching to take his seat, Penn stepped aside to avoid the spray of a street watering-cart, and came into collision with a boy whose attention was so wholly absorbed by a brand-new pair of boots on his feet that, walking with his eyes thus

directed, and his hands full of parcels, he plunged exactly into Penn's eccentric and disastrous way. There was a plaintive cry of "Ow! Ah, sister, they 're spoilt! That man scruffed his great foot right on to one of 'em!"

Never heeding Penn's entreaty for pardon, the boy turned his countenance, full of affliction, towards his sister, who looked anxiously at the damaged boot, too.

"It is nothing in the world," she said instantly, reproving and consoling in the same breath. "A little shoe-blacking will make it right again." At Penn's repeated apology, she turned her long, supple neck, and settled the matter promptly by saying that it was of no possible consequence.

It was this instant which made the whole trifling episode of consequence to Penn. He received a felicitous shock in the sudden turning upon him of a most unusual face, though its glance was as chilly as any man could have well hated to see. In remuner-

ation of this, however, Penn perceived that the girl was about to take a place in the Quakerville stage. The driver brought out more and larger parcels to her, bestowing them under the seat, and taking some up in front. The new boots mounted to a place beside the girl, and the boy in them continued to lance unforgiving looks at the otherwise disregarded William Penn.

The two inside seats of the stage fronted each other. This made a remarkable coincidence between Penn's opportunities and his wishes. He wished to look again, and perhaps again, at the face of this abrupt and startling girl. Uncovering his head, he took his own place on the front seat, placing his dressing-bag in an inoffensive position between his feet, with a manner as deferential as if he were regretfully intruding upon a private vehicle. He was thus *vis-à-vis* with the other occupants of the stage, but he gave his immediate attention, with a false appearance of concern, to the movements outside,

to the going and coming of warm and weary-looking men and women, of shoppers from the country with sunburned skins and the seaside fashions of the season. On the hot air there floated odors of bananas and pine-apples, peaches and pears, from a neighboring fruit-stand. The watering-cart added the freshness of a shower. Some pretty, flighty girls passing were much gratified by the seemingly studious look which Penn bestowed upon their graces. What he really perceived, however, was that the boy before him, after making an uneasy inventory of the parcels, and finding them all there, nestled up beside his sister, and locked his arm within hers. In turning his regard to the other side of the way, Penn let a passing glance take in the sister's face. He saw how it looked down upon the boy, and decided that it was her depth of expression which interested him.

A little man, blowing like a porpoise, climbed to the driver's seat. There was an

unusual number of passengers embarked for Quakerville. The florid driver looked at his stupendous silver time-keeper, cast reconnoitring glances up and down the sidewalk, and mounting to his place, clucked to his horses. They turned a few corners, and could see, in passing, up and down the length of shady streets. Penn leaned and looked intently, here and there, at certain places, for this was the town where he had lived for a few sad years with his little Spanish girl.

After the city streets were passed, and they came into the rural suburbs, with a weary expression Penn laid his hat upon his knees, and resting his head, closed his eyes. But what a view is afforded by the tiniest crevice between a pair of eyelids! Penn's naps, real or pretended, did not prevent his being keenly aware of every change in the little scene before him, every quiver of an eyelash, every cherishing ray that the dark gray eyes bestowed upon the

radiant young person contentedly basking under them.

There was little need of care in keeping this strategic watch, for nobody looked at him, and Penn sometimes allowed his eyes to open wide and take boldly in the fine, decided profile of the girl; the smooth sweep of dark hair from the temples and neck, up to its coil under her hat; the small ear, the slow, distinct changes of the flexible mouth, as she listened to impulsive outbursts of her companion, delivered in low but explosive tones, the sense of which was lost in the rattle of the stage to all but the ears to which the words were addresed. For half an hour their traveling companion was, to these self-absorbed young people, as if he had not been. To himself, he was one rapidly unfolding desire that this delightful instance of maidenly decision and kindness should vouchsafe to him one glance of responsive interest. The beautiful calm of her presence refreshed his tired spirit, and

he was in that susceptibility of temper which long suffering and loneliness engenders in a warm and sympathetic nature. He noticed everything about this girl, — how placidly her hands remained folded, and how constantly, one upon another, with the fingers curled under, and how this immovableness was contradicted by the vivid changes of her face. He even perceived that her soft gray dress had many little lines of black trimming, and innumerable tiny black buttons; that her black hat had a gray feather. This was the charming garb which had provoked Friend Rhoda to say, "Does thee think it right to put so much ornament upon these poor dying bodies, Vic*to*ry?" To which Victoria had responded, "But mine is n't dead yet, Friend Rhoda, and so long as I 've got to live in it, I must have it as nice and pleasant as I can."

Penn's eyes took in all this niceness and pleasantness, and then they wandered to the object which so enkindled hers. It

had seemed to him a little darkly glowing creature, sunbrowned to the color of a well-baked roll, but otherwise of indefinite particulars to his preoccupied attention. The boy had removed his straw hat, and was using it as a fan. He rubbed his hand over his golden-brown poll, and cast a naïve smile at his sister. Evidently the head had been recently barbered, and he was pleased with the sense of masculine propriety which this conferred. What was there in that coquettish smile which seemed familiar? It struck Penn that on some long-past plane such a smile had fallen upon him. The slight raising of the brows, the arching curl of the lips, — line for line that face, with that expression upon it, was a repetition of something well remarked and remembered. It dawned slowly upon Penn who this ten-year-old boy must be. If he had not known him for his own son, he must have known him for the son of his mother. But even more startling than

this persuasion was the rushing conviction that this, then, was the ministering Miss Montagu!

A flush mounted to Penn's forehead, and paled away. He did not move. He might have been a statue of sleep. The voice of the outside passenger shrilled in his ear: "Dead? Dead?" said he.

"Yes, dead and gone," the driver assented.

"What did he do with his farm, and the rest of his property?"

"He — left it, right there," the driver explained, in the solemn drawl with which he delivered his jocosities.

"That's how 't is," the passenger confessed. "Here's their things, but where be they? You see something sink in the water; you look for the hole, and it ain't there. That's how 't is."

The eyes of the boy at length fixed themselves upon that strangely still figure in the opposite corner. He set himself to see if it really breathed. As he watched, his own

face gathered a look of gravity. He bit his lip thoughtfully, and shrinking away into his nook beside his sister, approached her ear and whispered, "He looks sorry, or sick, or something."

Victoria lifted an attentive regard. She perceived the strained, tired expression which had marked a forehead almost too pronounced in its bumps. She looked somewhat inquisitively at the large, well-moulded features in their grave repose. "A man has room in a few square inches of face for the expression of all his history and his wants." The sweeping mustache hid the declaration which the mouth might have made, that this man was born to be a lover. But as the first thirty years of life are supposed to be a prognosis of life as a whole, the tendency to light or shadow being as uniform as a law (it is said) from the beginning, one might well have doubted, from the imprint of his thirty-three years, if Penn Compton would make his a successful

rôle. Still, those who disbelieved in this law might well have hoped to see it refuted.

Something solicitous in that appearance which had arrested Ferdinand held Victoria's gaze until a pair of earnest, quickly kindling eyes opened slowly, directly upon her. There was an instantaneous mutual surprise of expressions, intent, full of unexpected interest.

The awkwardness of this was soon dissipated, however, by a sudden dash of Ferdinand at the great, bloodthirsty mosquitoes that invaded the coach during its passage through the dense pine woods. He rose and aimed a murderous blow; but, the horses starting at the same time for a trot down hill, the impetus of the jerk and the determination of the blow plunged him headlong upon the stranger, both feet grinding unmercifully upon the boots which terminated a pair of long legs, vainly endeavoring to reduce their length to conformity with the narrow space allotted them.

"Aha, my boy, now we 're even!" cried the beleaguered man, and, much to his surprise, Ferdinand found it impossible to escape from his clasping arms.

"I guess not," said Ferdinand; "I stepped on both of thine, and I scruffed a good deal harder."

"Well, seeing who thee is, I 'll forgive thee," said the man in a low, caressing tone.

Ferdinand stared and frowned intently.

"Who am I, Ferdinand? Tell me! Has thee forgotten me?"

Ferdinand pushed himself back and stared again with parted lips. "It ain't — it ain't *my father!*" he mumbled, quite choked by the rushing in of this new idea.

Penn drew the boy closer for his reply.

Ferdinand's visions of a father, fading into dullness which foreboded indifference, were revived and materialized. He felt the mounting pride of a boy in the possession of a great, manly parent, and having hugged his possession with real joy, he hid his bash-

ful face on his father's neck. In that mixture of shyness and delight, he remained clasped and speechless for what seemed to Victoria a long period of astounding experience, during which the whole cast of her horoscope, as it had appeared an hour before, the aspect of present and future, was altogether changed. She turned and looked with consternation, yet without seeing, at the tangle of wild things that clambered and clung on the roadside fences. Incredible as it was, Ferdinand's father had arisen! She had buried him, a feeble, insignificant, every way incapable man, and he had come up in impressive dignity, seeming to say that he was weary of power and prosperity.

Her first sensations were of shame and confusion. Those months of what now appeared to have been his silent disdain concentrated into one humiliating moment. There was indignation, too, that she had been so misled. If he had revealed himself in all his grandeur, instead of his groans,

would she ever have made that bold advance? But even indignation fainted and failed, at length. She felt herself poor and every way defeated, — the proud Miss Montagu!

Presently Ferdinand rose, sparkling. "Why, sister!" he cried, "is n't it strange I did n't know? It 's my father! Ain't he a nice father?"

Victoria's grave gaze did not seem like assent.

"My son has acquired a sister, it appears," said Penn pleasantly. "That makes me doubly a father, does n't it?"

"His having acquired a father will do away with the need of a sister," returned Victoria with especial meaning in her tone.

"Once a brother, always a brother. Is n't that so, Ferdinand?" said Penn, apparently unpierced by the meaning.

"Umph! I must have my sister, anyhow," Ferdinand declared, springing from his father's embrace to kneel beside Victo-

ria and lay his cheek against her folded hands.

The hands did not move. They remained quietly laid one upon the other, with the fingers tucked under. Penn wondered that they did not offer an answering caress. If the withholding of it appeared to denote coldness, the look she bent upon the boy disputed that.

"Thee can't think what a lot she 's learned — no, taught me," said Ferdinand. "And she 's going to take me to New York. I 'm going to sing to thousands of people, and have pay, and learn all kinds of lessons every day. That 's why she 's bought me so many new things, — new clothes, new boots, new hat, and everything. And I had my hair cut at a real barber's. Smell of it!" Ferdinand jumped up and presented his fragrant brush to his father's senses.

Penn was much like Ferdinand in his quick blushes. He flushed to the waves of his hair again, and frankly owned himself

embarrassed. "I 'm sure this is Miss Montagu," he said. "I knew long ago of our family debt. My father wrote me of — of the comfort you were to him."

"It was dull in Quakerville," said Victoria. "I pleased myself by making friends with Captain Compton and Ferdinand."

Ferdinand, impatient of ceremonious talk, burst into questions of what had kept his father all this while. Why had he never come nor written?

The indefinite being before whom Penn had wished to vindicate himself, for the sake of his sensitive self-esteem, had become the most definite creature he had ever seen, and one to whom he could wish all his most positive merits to make a lasting appeal. He was able to tell a little story in a vein which addressed itself to the boyish imagination, and at the same time plead for allowance at a severer tribunal. He told of a contest he had had with a grim ogre who had undertaken to shut him down for-

ever in an underground prison, but that he had persuaded the old fellow to let him off upon the plea that he wished first to see his boy. So he had gained a reprieve. He was off on a furlough, so to speak, and he had been greatly hindered in getting to his destination by meeting lions on the way, which he had been compelled to slay, and smaller difficulties that needed to be arranged in order that the last pages of his history might be left open for this agreeable sequel, — "they lived happy ever after." Every day he had hoped to set out to find his boy, and give him a surprise, and so he had not written. Would Ferdinand forgive him, if he promised never to do so any more?

This was all said in a way which may be called winning, and it won Victoria to moderate her harsh judgment, which was the more easily accomplished because she began to cherish a dim hope that in his experiences of lion-slaying, etc., he had never encountered that mistaken missive of hers.

"Now, what 's thee going to do, father, when we 've gone to New York, eh?" Ferdinand presently inquired.

"Heaven help me, what can I do?" Penn responded, with mock despair. "At present, I 'm occupied with the pleasure of a journey to Quakerville."

"Thee might come too. Next month — the last part of it — we 're going to start."

"*In-deed!*"

The tone distinctly warned Victoria that her dear plans were come to naught. She was apparently giving her attention to the clever twirl and skit with which the stage-driver sent the daily evening newspaper into the hands, or the dooryard, of a subscriber, as they trotted past. At somebody's gate, a collie dog was watching for it, and bore it away with daily evening importance.

Ignorant of the joy with which she had planned for the little boy she loved, Penn could not understand the grave and anxious expression with which she regarded these

cheerful wayside incidents. He looked in vain for girlish revelations of herself. Again he thought of the fixed repose of those hands. Not once had they moved. He could never know the fine, expressive gestures they had been wont to make, but he wished them, at least, to be alive.

"Perhaps there 's something from South America in here," said Ferdinand, toying with his father's dressing-bag.

"Let me see. Well, yes, there is," Penn responded; and he presently produced a box from which he removed an antique silver image.

"Tha-at!" drawled Ferdinand, hardly suppressing his contempt. "What 's that good for?"

Penn conceived a use for it. He reached it over to Victoria. "Let me show you something curious, Miss Montagu," he said. "A holy image, much older than the conquest of Peru, brought over from Madrid by one of Ferdinand's ancestors."

Victoria leaned towards it, and examined it with an amiable appearance of interest. She did not touch it.

Surprised, disappointed of his expected triumph over the invincible hands, Penn gave the curio up to the possession of Ferdinand, and showed his graceful gift once more by telling a charming story of the quaint little Spanish grandmother, who had cherished the precious silver saint of her ancestors for many years. She believed that it brought its possessor good fortune, and preserved him from harm. For that she had sent it to her grandson, the only one left to inherit it.

Repeatedly, his felicitous manner seemed to impose the conclusion that this young man was a delightful, if not a model parent.

He leaned towards the freshening breeze, and drew a long breath of it. It lifted a lock of his hair. There seemed to be no cogency of reason for more relenting towards him on that account. "Ah, the sweet

New England fields!" he said. "Nowhere on earth are the wild odors so delicious."

The difference between New England and South America was transporting. It was in everything, — in the atmosphere, in himself, but especially in something more pervasive, even, than the atmosphere.

By degrees there came to be conversation, — pleasant, amicable, sometimes merry. The rapid change and exchange of thought during that little *vis-à-vis* journey through the sweet, lonesome fields and woods was equivalent, perhaps, to a year's intercourse in the world of conventions. There was much progress in acquaintance from the tendency of each to studiously observe the other, which always occurs between persons mutually surprised by the advance and improvement which reality has made upon imagination. It needed not much study to learn that there was admiration and pleasure in every look which Penn cast into the corner diagonally opposite his own. He

was frank, and his frankness found its chief outlet through his eyes. His nature was such that he might have said, at any time, "I declare that was I in a desert, I would find out wherewith in it to call forth my affection," and so far was he from a desert that he seemed to have discovered the choicest fruit of the human garden.

The sprucely painted or unpainted little houses drew together towards a village, their front dooryards neglected, grassed over, or glowing with asters, petunias, dahlias, sometimes carefully wired over to exclude marauding hens. A grist-mill sent out a burring sound. The stage slowed up, and stopped before the village store and post-office, upon the platform of which, in the mellow, slanting sunshine, was arrayed the convention which daily met to receive it, and called its stringent business "waitin' for the mail." They accepted it, with jocose salutations from the driver, and after depositing it, passed to the contingent business of

returning the driver his chaff. The mail to be taken up for Quakerville was not ready. Somebody was writing a letter to go in it, which made a delay. A wagon-load of pale, early pippins, that turned up blushing cheeks to the sun, came down a cross-road and stopped against the stage, also to wait for the mail.

The driver, whose face seemed a replica of the rosy side of the pippins, tossed one over to the bright-eyed boy in the stage, who received it with smiling gratitude, but instead of experimenting upon its quality, he held it with a patient care while, the mail having been furnished with the letter, the stage started on in a spray of chaff and laugh between the convention and its departing delegate. Penn wondered if the boy's hesitation over the apple was really a mark of his good manners. "What 's the matter with thy apple?" he asked.

"Nothing 's the matter," Ferdinand answered, "but I — I want my sister to have it."

"Bless your little heart, you 'd give me much greater pleasure by setting your teeth in it this minute! Do that for me!" said Victoria.

Ferdinand obeyed, tasting the fruit slowly, with none of the zest which usually marks the conjunction of the boy and the apple. Evidently he was disappointed in his hope of bestowing. Penn's heart went out to him with a warm rush. He drew the boy to his side, and called his attention to the old landmarks that he had known since his own boyhood: the little cabin where old black Jinny had sold sassafras and sarsaparilla beer and gingerbread, especially on Seventh-day, to all the boys round about who had acquired pennies during the week. He pointed out an open grassy space in the woods where the last Indian's wigwam had stood, and a hole which had been the repository of his vegetables. Penn declared that he had made little journeys to look at it, in boyhood, with as profound impressions as

he had since felt before the ruins of great things.

There was the little white meeting-house, on the edge of the woods, where a community of people worshiped who were of very mixed and diluted blood, but who still lived on the lands inherited from their Indian ancestors. In the graveyard adjoining rested the remains of an Indian chief.

The sun was low, and the shadows long, when they reached Quakerville. Penn said no more. He felt the changes all the more that there were no outward changes. It was the little village of his childhood. Over yonder he could see the old home, — no longer home.

There was not a hotel in the little hamlet, and but one house where the wayfaring man, if he could give a good account of himself, was hospitably accommodated. Penn directed the driver to this, — the house of Nathan and Susannah Green.

Victoria was dismayed. It had never

occurred to her how this returned native would dispose himself in Quakerville. It was a new idea to Penn, too, when he saw Victoria moving to dismount at his own destination. He descended quickly, and stood ready to help her. The stage was awkwardly high, and the small space between the wheels seemed full of obstacles and embarrassments to the poor girl. She involuntarily and helplessly put out her hand, with a groping movement, as she made her first step. Penn met it promptly. But what he grasped was not the softly firm, smoothly gloved member, the touch of which he expected with pleasure. It was something too meagre; something cramped, attenuated, and some of the little truncated fingers seemed eked out with stuffing. It was beyond Penn's power to withstand the shock. There was a shuddering inward revulsion; a sudden fall from the warmth of delighted admiration to the chill of pity and sick sensuosity. In spite of the imme-

diate protest of his higher nature against the infirmity of its recreant appendage, this sudden damp and cold of the sensibilities produced a frost, high and low, through the whole nature of the man.

Victoria, proudly sensitive, perceived the quick change of expression. She moved straight on into the house, and upstairs, the general straight after, making sure of his entrance before she closed the door of her room. She turned vaguely from side to side of it, like a creature looking for some way of escape. Her shoulders heaved. Her breathing was audible. Her eyes had the dilated expression of one who suffers physical anguish. She thrust aside the general's eager attentions, but then, with sudden impulse, stooping and drawing his head to her side with a vehemence which made him wink hard, she said, "Be content, old fellow. The more I know man, the more I shall prefer the dog. With *them*, all depends upon what kind of faces and hands we have."

CHAPTER IX.

UNDER THE MOON.

She wished not to go to tea; to offer her weariness as an excuse. But Ferdinand was there. He would be disappointed. "And did I not resolve in the beginning to put down this miserable cringing, — to go on using such hands as I have as if they were perfect?" she said. "Ah, but how could I know it would ever be — like *that!*"

She was late in taking her place at table, but when she did, her quiet covered something forever put away. She was admirable in that after-calm of conquest. The homely, low-walled, brown-toned room was enriched by her presence. She took what she required with the deliberate touch of

the old times, when she did not mind having it observed that her hands were fine and handsome. Penn perceived the noble, unobtrusive, yet unconstrained independence. "It is I who am pitiable," he said.

He lingered as if in a troubled dream over his old-fashioned white and purple tea-cup, and when Susannah asked, "Is thy cup out, William Penn?" let her fill it the third time, that he might seem to have something occupying him.

Susannah had adjusted her spectacles and disappeared behind a journal which Penn had brought from Philadelphia, the Mecca of Quakers. It contained something about John Bright, one of their prophets. This would have left her guests to a too exclusive contemplation of each other, but they were diverted by a series of apparitions at the outside door. First, a barefooted boy, whose mother asked the loan of Susannah's chopping-tray, since their own was in use for watering the sheep.

Susannah had barely settled herself after denying this appeal, when a roseate vision appeared, something like a man, encompassed from top to toe in a pink mosquito netting. It softly, with an air of gentle regret, opened the door just enough to set in a small milk-can, the sight of which appeared to exasperate Susannah. "Is that all the milk thee 's brought me, Laban Slocomb?" she called out, stepping across and opening the door wide, that she might scathe the milkman the more freely. "There ain't enough to set the bread with. And where 's my eggs?"

The peaked, harassed-looking being, trailing his pink netting, turned a fretful face, and parted with the drainings of his patience. "It 's a turrible pressure on our cow, and an awful strain on our hens, to keep thee supplied with milk and aigs, Susannah," he said, in the shrill tone of a teased woman, "but we 'll do the best we can. I 'll bring the aigs in the mornin', if

the Plymouth Rock decides to lay, so 's to make out the even dozen."

"Thee do!" said Susannah severely. "Thee bring 'em before breakfast. I 've a good will to give up dependin' on dry cows and Plymouth Rock for my milk and eggs."

The third opening of the outer door disclosed a perfect rose of a girl, who hesitated upon the threshold, and then apparently decided to withdraw.

"What 's thee want, Rachel Buffingdon?" Susannah inquired, over the top of her newspaper and spectacles.

"Oh, nothing. I 'll come again by and by," Rachel responded, without a decided retreat.

"Rachel Buffingdon!" exclaimed Penn. "Not the little Rachel I fished out of the herring-weir? If it is, do come in, and let me see what I preserved to the world."

Rachel came in without any further pretense of hesitation, and seated herself favorably for Penn's inspection.

Ferdinand laid down his bread and butter, and looked as if he had reason to think that something interesting was about to come off.

"Does thee remember Penn Compton?" Penn himself inquired.

"Oh, yes; my memory 's pretty good for one of my years," returned Rachel, drawing her lips in roguishly and lisping to make herself like an old woman who has lost all her teeth, and then laughing to show a double row of them, exquisitely white and even.

"A bashful little maid thou was then," said Penn, "and ran away the instant thy feet were on dry ground."

"She's got over that, *com-plete*," said Susannah from around the corner of her newspaper.

"No, indeed; she 's quite too bashful still," Rachel declared, covering her face with a small, white, dimpled hand, and peeping through her fingers at Penn.

"Thy bashfulness was unbecoming at

the time when I expected a few thanks, and did n't get them," said Penn.

"Oh, that 's what I 've come for, now, — to thank thee. It 's been on my mind ever since."

"I feel amply rewarded, however," said Penn gallantly, "by seeing the result of my pains."

"So that thou may understand what a mistake was made in prolonging my career, I 'll step out, and let Susannah talk about me a little," said the girl, rising with slow grace, and meandering into the kitchen. Directly, she was heard talking volubly to the cat. Then there was silence, except for an occasional soft rustle and a low, smothered laugh. Presently, just as they were rising from table, in bounded the cat, and made successive tours around the room, with an excited purpose to escape.

"Oh, see!" cried Ferdinand. "What makes that quill follow the cat? Look, look, how it runs after him!"

All eyes were bent upon Puss, and all wondered to see the animated turkey's-feather skip merrily hither and thither, always a little behind the pursued and frightened cat.

"A singular phenomenon!" murmured Rachel from the doorway, where she looked on with exaggerated gravity, her mouse-colored gown setting off the brightness of her beauty. "In my opinion, it's an instance of capillary attraction. Will this learned gentleman make an investigation and give us his view?"

Penn took up the cat. It settled into the angle of his arm, as if it had found a refuge. The quill still followed, springing and bobbing like a romping little devil. Penn carried the whole wonder to the somewhat waning light at the window, and laughed aloud.

"Am I right?" asked Rachel. "Is there anything capillary about it?"

"There is something very attractive and

hair-like," said Penn, and he passed over the quill for general inspection, attached to a long bright hair, of the color which glorified Rachel's heavy crown.

"Philosophy seems to be my calling," said Rachel. "I feel bound to go home and sit up all night, clearing up some other mystery. But I hope to enjoy the excitement of reviewing some more thrilling events of our youth," she said to Penn, in her deliberate, low-toned fashion of speech. "Miss Montagu does n't return my visits, so I did n't come to see her; and Susannah does n't want to see me, ever, at all. I came to find out who it was I saw going along in the stage. I had no idea it was my life-preserver. 'S thou come to stay?"

"For a few days."

"Well, pray continue to do benevolent things, that we shall gratefully remember. Farewell." And she slipped out with the smooth glide of a trim yacht, saluting the one at the window with the fluttering flag of her handkerchief as she passed.

There were, alas, some of the vain airs of the flirt in this modernized and worldly little Quakeress. But there was the engaging frankness of a boy in her coquettish chatter, and the outward serenity of her breeding in even her boldest movements. She never seemed eager, but sent off her sky-rockets with a steady hand. Her effervescent spirits sent the stopper flying, but never lost their sparkle and foam. They had borne too much suppression, and found their limit of high pressure during the wholesome but rigid discipline of the Friends' School, at Providence. There she discovered that she was extremely pretty and bright, and there she developed an unquenchable thirst for masculine appreciation. She was innocent of grave faults, save those of vanity and an unconscionable zest for fun, and ignorant that there were evil ways too closely resembling some of her own ways to be easily distinguished as different. She had seen Penn arrive on the stage, and

immediately indulged her wish to make his acquaintance. She found it dull passing the summer with her grandmother in Quakerville.

Soon after Râchel had gone, Penn went away with Ferdinand, to see his old friend and schoolmistress, and make all things fair and understood with her, in regard to her care of his boy.

Victoria stood at her window and saw him go down the sandy, grass-bordered walk. His nervously quick figure seemed to give a touch of strangeness to the sleepy street.

The beautiful chain of blue pools, that found their outlet in the distant bay, had blood-red dashes of color. Victoria saw them fade quite away before she turned back and thoughtfully put away her things in the twilight. Then, lighting her lamp, she seated herself with her purse and account-book, to see how much money she had expended that day, and how much was left. She went over her shopping items, jotting

them all down. Then there was the journey home; the stage fare — *the stage fare.* She stared into her confused memory. She started to her feet. The account-book fell. The money jingled over the straw matting. Like something driven by the wind, Victoria swept out of the house, flew up the footpath, past all the serene house-lights of the village, to the home of the stage-driver. At the sound of her sharp rap, he appeared in a *négligé* of shirt, trousers, and stocking-feet, shading a lamp with his hand, so as to throw himself into vivid high-light, and told her that the gentleman had paid her fares, adding, "I s'pose he thought you wanted him to."

This being Victoria's own harrowing supposition, she turned helplessly back with her vexation to the calm, indifferent night. Regaining the common pathway, she kept on excitedly in the direction away from home. The night was still with heat. The country road stretched on into unbroken loneliness

and peace, — a sweet, safe, Arcadian peace. She had left the whole village behind her. Those moon-bathed fields, the background of black pines, against which the fireflies glimmered, the cry of a whippoorwill, the near and far chirp and twitter of insects, promised the escape from humanity for which she longed. She indulged herself with a deep plunge into the soothing isolation. Her condition of mind was but a disordered play of simple abstractions. To inquire into it too curiously would be without compensation. She had walked a mile before she perceived that her shoes and skirts were wet from the dew of the grassy way. The quiet greatness of the night had imparted its peace. She slowly returned, facing the moon, and feeling the exaltation which comes of looking up into calm light and infinite space, and breathing the sweet essence of warm, dew-soaked fields and woods. Her head thrown back, and her slow movement, gave her a rather superb

aspect. She made a figure, truly, — bare-headed, in her light gray gown, which the moon turned to whiteness, marching majestically and alone down the resplendent way. Presently, she perceived that she was about to meet another figure coming from the village. It was the figure of a man with his hands in his pockets, — the thinking attitude of his race and sex. His head was bent down by the weight of his reflections. He raised it with alertness as the gleaming apparition approached. Victoria could see an unlighted, or a gone-out cigar under the sweeping mustache. The man stepped aside, renounced his cigar, and said doubtfully, "Miss Montagu?"

"Yes. Just enjoying my own company a little."

"After such company, do you despise mine? May I walk on with you?"

"Oh, certainly."

"Pray keep in the path; the grass is very wet. You seemed to be worshiping the moon."

"Yes, indeed; I worship the moon, of course. My mind turns to lunary and sublunary matters, both, to-night. (I must have gotten that phrase from a book!) I came out especially to see Mr. Cobb."

"Mr. Cobb! Don't let me interfere"—

"Cobb, the stage-driver, you know."

"Oh!"

"I forgot to pay him this evening, and I find, to my annoyance, that it is some one else with whom I have to deal."

"Why to your annoyance?"

"Because I like things simple; I don't like unnecessary complications."

"It seems a simple matter enough."

"Oh, well; I 'm not making a fuss. I don't mind a little extra trouble."

"I 'm afraid you have no sense of humor, Miss Montagu," said Penn, looking dreamily down the pathway with a faint smile.

"Perhaps not."

The smile gave place to an expression of deepest gravity.

"There is an infinite page of debit which torments *me*," said Penn. "I am proud, too, and have instincts of independence, though you may not suppose it. But I suddenly find myself in the humiliating position of beneficiary to a young lady whom I have never seen. It is uncertain how long I should have remained there, but for your kind hint."

Victoria stopped abruptly, as if she had come against a wall. "My hint, Mr. Compton?" she said, in a clear, ringing voice.

"Your suggestive letter, then," returned Penn, standing face to face with her, and looking bravely and steadily down at her.

The open-hearted night seemed to have imparted its influence to both. The flush which swept up to Victoria's eyelids could be seen, but she did not flinch. "Ah, I was not aware that you had met with a letter of mine," she said, with a proud gesture which delighted Penn. "I do not

recollect any intimation, any acknowledgment" —

"That is what I am here for, — to acknowledge it, to reply to it, to bless you for it. It was the only reply possible. It stung me to life. I cannot tell you. All seemed to be eternally over, — eternally impossible with me. I was dead. It was time for the resurrection, but I could not come forth until you gave the word. Ah, Miss Montagu," Penn exclaimed with ardor, mixing his figures, and rushing from doctrine to doctrine, from Gospel to Pentateuch, "it was a new fall of man, — a new scheme of redemption."

"It was a great mistake of mine," said Victoria, starting on again. "Some things I did not understand, or I could not have blundered so."

"Nothing can be a mistake which brings the right things to pass," said Penn.

They moved as if to slow music, their long shadows following and pointing them

out as passages to be noted on that plain page of nature.

"But if you realize what a musical wonder Ferdinand is," said Victoria, "you will not be surprised at my risking something to make sure he should not be wasted. I wished to secure him for those who could appreciate him."

"You have made the boy so happy," said Penn, "that it is despair to me to try to think how I can ever make him contented. He is in a seventh heaven. How can I get courage to drag him down, and set him on the earth again?"

"You are too figurative for my understanding."

"Well, then, plainly, I don't want him to be a singer, a musician. I shall send him to school. He will have to part with you. It will be hard for him."

"And poor, mistaken Nature has made him a musician!"

"I'm sorry for that."

"Why?"

"We-ell, I love Music, — heavenly maid! The singing voice has great power over me; but, for a man to make music the pursuit of a lifetime, — much as I love it, and much as I 've pursued it, and hung upon it, I can't seem to want my son to do nothing else."

"You don't love it much, if you think a lifetime enough to give to it."

"Ah, Miss Montagu, I shall be glad to love moderately, where there is danger of loving too much. It might not be difficult to agree with you in regard to some other boy, but I really must hope to have Ferdinand choose something else as a vocation. That is not half the difficulty, however. This plan of being with you has wrapped him up in bliss. It can't be carried out, and the disappointment will — I do not know what it will do to him. In the hour I passed with him at Friend Rhoda's this evening, I became afraid to speak. He is an intense

spirit. Perhaps he was only made for such things as love and music."

Then Victoria felt constrained to plead for Ferdinand. It was impossible to speak for herself, but she offered a short, eloquent petition for the boy's threatened happiness. The mute hands broke through their reserve and spoke again, as in their days of power and influence. They waved aside the hollow objections to Ferdinand entering life through the appointed door, and being forced to climb over a wall. They rose and fell in graceful emphasis. Penn saw it all, — saw more than he heard. (Ah, if he could forget those exasperating gloves!) He did not dream that he was about to wound her by the same blow which he was preparing for Ferdinand. He thought of her as simply kind and friendly to his boy. He could not know that she had never loved a human being since she could remember, but this child. How should he have conceived her to be so lonely and alone

as that? Or how could he at once understand the exquisite way in which she and Ferdinand suited each other?

He declared that it was difficult to withstand her eloquence and clever reasoning, but the only course which seemed right to him was that Ferdinand should be sent to a man's school, with other boys.

They had reached the first house of the short village street. They no longer seemed to be alone. A dog barked. Somebody peeped out through the slats of a lighted window-shutter. The footsteps of a belated patriarch were heard returning home from the grocery. They moved silently down the white way, which seemed to be covered with ink sketches of distorted things. They reached Nathan Green's doorstep.

"By the way, Miss Montagu," said Penn, "my visit here is short, this time. Just be so good as to give me the memoranda of those pecuniary expenses for Ferdinand, in the morning, will you?"

"Certainly. They are not much."

"As for the rest" — Penn hesitated.

"As for the rest, I have managed to provide you with new perplexities. I am very sorry."

"I should be sorry, if I could be sorry," said Penn, "but somehow I am only anxious and — deeply interested. You have been my friend without intending it, — without knowing, or caring. Don't drop me! Let me slip into your regard alongside of Ferdinand. May I?"

"Well, I don't know," said Victoria. "It is about six hours since I had the first glimpse of you. Wait until I know you as well as I know Ferdinand."

"Very well. I am allowed a probation, then. That is something. I shall sit here on the porch, and smoke my cigar, and be thankful for that."

With a quick, unthinking impulse, he offered his hand, in the old Quaker fashion, in saying good-night. Victoria shrank.

Then, remembering what she had resolved, she gave her hand simply into his. He held it gently, and this time the touch of the little ruined fingers sent a rush of piteous tenderness to his very warm heart.

But as he sat smoking his cigar, he tried to disentangle, reduce to order, and name his emotions. Emotional as he was by nature, there was something new in the undeliberate march he had made into those present sensations. What touch had opened a strange, deep place in his heart? Was it love? He brought out his ideal, — the hidden idol which every man carries in some niche of his consciousness, and to which he offers up his longings. He measured; he compared; and he summed up his conclusions by saying No, he should never be really in love with a woman whose hand he could not delight to hold. Bewitching beauty, of itself, could no longer overpower him, for had he not seen that fade and leave, ah, so little else? It was the else he asked

for chiefly, but the touch of a woman's hand was the magic seal without which he should not recognize the sacred passion. The eternal touch of a glove! Never! He might regard a woman above all the women he had ever seen, feel the tenderest, most cherishing emotions towards her, but that composite rapture which goes by the name of love, that perfect harmony and resignation of all the powers of life to love, only love, could never, with this break in the magnetic chain, never take place, — in him. And he hated himself, and all his race, because so much depended upon these poor chances of the flesh. He felt humiliated by the facts of his human nature.

Victoria gathered up her account-book and the scattered contents of her purse, and sitting up to the lamp, put down the items and amount of Mr. Compton's debt to her, giving him credit for two stage fares.

A matter-of-fact, sensible woman was the only rôle suited to her, she said.

CHAPTER X.

"BLACK AND WHITE DAY."

She came to breakfast the next morning having had strange dreams. She felt how unfair was the tyranny of that stealthy influence which imposes upon the helpless the very follies they eschew in their freedom. She took a severe attitude towards the person who had ventured into her unwarned, defenseless fancy.

She found him standing by a window, waiting. His eyes were on the door as she entered. His bright-hued mustache, freshly dressed, was so brushed up that it left his mouth revealed as she had not seen it, — that mouth which proclaimed him a born lover. In her dreams, even, she had not dreamed he had a smile like that. His

earnest face, and this tender smile, so involuntary to him, had troubled many a woman's heart long after she had been forgotten. To Victoria, then, who had not been wont to consider how men looked, the singularly sweet and penetrating contemplation which accompanied this first "good-morning" was a sudden illumination. It was not with pleasure, but with dread, that she saw that this one was lovable.

But to love what is lovable. It is a rule. Not a rational rule; not to be depended upon, like the Rule of Three. It is the rule of eighteen. And Victoria was eighteen. The misfortune of loving, with its despair, she shunned as a maimed creature, who had no part in those joys of life which depend so much upon physical perfection. She did not know that in the recognition of this man with the glowing morning face as an object lovable, a new leaf of the bud had unfolded; that her whole, rich, slumbering nature was ready to blossom out.

She was rather silent during breakfast, and the lovable object was himself sorely oppressed by the prospect of going out immediately to have a talk with Ferdinand.

After he had gone, Victoria sat on the shady porch, and seemed to be reading an essay upon the "Niebelungen Lied." The general, blissfully content at her side, enjoyed an occasional ecstatic pull at his left ear.

She awaited the result of the talk with a heart that throbbed hard and heavily. Penn would have lost in her esteem, perhaps, if he had chosen the easier way, to save himself these difficulties. Her sympathy was warm and sincere for both, — the boy to be sacrificed, and the father steeling himself to plunge the sacrificial knife.

After an hour of gazing at her white and gold book, she had very little idea of its contents. The theme seemed too fantastic. She was startled by the voice of Susannah Green at the window beside her. "If that

was my girl," said she, "I'd lock her up and keep her on water gruel till her tricks was taken out of her."

Victoria turned, and saw through the trellis, which bore the Madeira vine, Rachel Buffingdon coming, in a white gown, her big straw hat tilted back so as to leave the way clear for aiming her most bewitching rogueries straight at Penn. He received them smilingly, but unresponsively, and seemed to be passively surrendering to an impression. Beside his father walked Ferdinand, also impressed. Victoria's heart leaped towards the boy, but she shrank away into the house — to her own room. There was a rush of new feeling. She had never known the homesick pang before. She heard the approach of Rachel's light, smoothly flowing badinage, and Penn's occasional brief and deep-voiced response. Then there were quick footsteps on the stairs, and Ferdinand rapped at her door.

"Sister, — good-morning, sister," he said.

"Do come down. Rachel Buffingdon wants to ask thee something."

It was evident that he had not yet received the blow. He was in his usual happy mood.

"'Hail to thee, blithe spirit,'" said Victoria, stopping to look at him, holding his face between her hands.

"Father 's been taking a walk with Rachel Buffingdon," he whispered. "He likes her, I can tell." He wagged his head, boastful of his own keenness. "But she likes him the most."

"That is not for you to say, Ferdinand. What makes you think of such things?"

"Oh, I was wondering if I should have to have her for my next mother. Boys do have new ones. I know some. But I shall live with thee, always — always. It won't make any difference." He leaned upon her arm, and looked up with beaming contentment.

"We can never tell what is going to be. You must make up your mind to take what-

ever comes bravely — *bravely*, Ferdinand. Will you?"

"Wh-y, yes," said Ferdinand, laughing up at her with his sweetest radiance. "But it does n't matter what comes, for I shall have thee — *thee* — *thee!*" He whispered it with the ardor of a lover, and followed her downstairs with a buoyant step.

Rachel Buffingdon wished to say to Victoria that this day week would be "Black and White Day," and she suspended her flirtation to explain that over on Indian Neck there was a singular community of people, a mixture of the Indian, negro, and white races, — a poor, forlorn, and isolated people, but easily made happy, — and that every year a party of white people from Quakerville and the larger neighboring villages, with their guests and summer boarders, went over to the Neck to give them a holiday. Tables were spread among the oaks and pines, and loaded with temptations and satisfactions for appetites that

expected only fish and beans during the remainder of the year. Then the entertainers contrived as many new ways as possible of interesting and amusing the colored people. The aged and invalid were cheered by especial attentions, the children were made blissfully happy, and finally there was left for each family a little stock and store which made them feel rich while it lasted. When all that was accomplished, the white people refreshed themselves by a basket picnic of their own, sitting about upon the pine needles. It was a day to which the colored people looked forward all the year. This year it was hoped that a new pleasure might be offered. They wished Miss Montagu would sing. Mr. Compton had promised to entertain them by telling remarkable stories, and saying surprising things.

"Come, now!" said Penn.

"Did n't he, Ferdinand?"

"I don't know. I only heard thee say-

ing surprising things," said Ferdinand, with hands in his pockets, and a rather defiant lift of his dainty chin.

"Thou little monster! Thou seem'st to have no regard for my two gray hairs."

Rachel had really the inheritance of prematurely gray hair, which was beginning to declare itself in two or three threads, to which she liked to call attention.

"Let 's see 'em," said Ferdinand, stepping over to her.

She bent her head, and showed how superbly its rich covering rounded up on either side of the thread-like line of parting. "Right here, somewhere," said she, and in pointing out the spot, the dark, soft, ruddy background of her head brought out the fairness of her lovely hand. Everything conduced to showing off Rachel, and Penn seemed fully conscious and appreciative of the sweet display.

"I don't see any," said Ferdinand.

"No, nobody sees anything venerable

about me. However, that is n't what I came to see about." She repeated her hope that Victoria would come and sing.

Victoria did not refuse. "But Ferdinand is the singer," she said. "I should like them to hear him."

Penn had objections, but he did not mention them, and much to Ferdinand's content he was put on the programme, and Rachel, full of her pretty diableries, departed, flirting to the last, and elated with the prospect of a whole day of flirtation to come.

The week preceding Black and White Day was occupied by Victoria in somewhat vain efforts to seclude herself. She was crossed by the mysterious omnipresence of two people. Rachel Buffingdon, on the other hand, was devoted to looking for that same property in one person only. So Victoria frequently met her and Penn in an apparently casual saunter. But it was Victoria who was surprised by Penn (always with Ferdinand) in her loneliest haunts, and

she justly suspected that the boy, duteously devoting himself to his father, missed his more sympathetic companion, and led the way to those places where he knew she would be found.

Ferdinand, being spared the projected blow until after Black and White Day, still sparkled and rejoiced. Many an hour the three remained where they met, on the shore. One day, with a ductility not to be expected of her, Victoria gave herself up, and went sailing on the bay, and out to sea, miles away from Rachel Buffingdon. On that one day, under the heavenly arch, she was happy. She felt like a winged angel, skimming the liquid plain. She forgot the small matter of her hands. She only felt that other angels were near. Her happiness gave her a piquant fascination. Penn almost forgot the hands, too.

Victoria told herself that this sail — or her participation in it — was for Ferdinand's sake, but when such invitations multiplied,

she declined them all. And this was said to be for Ferdinand's sake, too, that he might begin to learn to do without her.

At the end of a week, Victoria aroused from a long restlessness, a long suspension of the common course of life, to find that she was expected now to do something. For it was Black and White Day; really, a blue and gold day, with clear sky full of sunshine, but cooled by the easterly wind welcome to that region in August. Little flotillas of sailboats were moving towards Indian Neck from all quarters. Not one of them carried Miss Montagu. She meant to go late, but yet to go. So Ferdinand went with his father, carrying a rather downcast visage, and Victoria waited for Friend Rhoda, as she expressed it, and went by the road, with Caleb Green to drive. She acknowledged that she was thereby weaning Ferdinand, but she believed she was at the same time wisely putting a distance between herself and all those sweet joys of life that were too sweet for her.

She scorned and derided herself for the foolish glad excitement which she felt as she approached of necessity those whom she had avoided with severe discretion. She was later than she had intended. From two or three of the little huts, squatting about on the sand, the blue, dying-away smoke of some of the dinner preparations was still ascending. But the long tables, covered with unbleached cotton cloth and empty dishes, had the despoiled appearance of after dinner. The colored people, anodyned with the extreme justice they had done to the feast, were now sitting or standing in a straggling half-circle. Their faces were of every hue that human faces take, from the healthful white, the pallid, sallow, ashy, and smoky, through the brown, cinnamon, mahogany, and rosewood tints, up to coal blackness. In the old aristocrats of the community, who lived on the land never yet quitted by their people, the Indian blood was strongly evident. Their clothing

was more multicolored than their faces, and conspicuously gay, so that the scene which nature had made low-toned and monotonous seemed to have flourished out in parterres of tropical luxuriance.

The dark, desirous eyes in those uplifted faces were all fixed upon Penn, who stood upon a mound which raised him above them all, saying intensely welcome things, apparently, — things they knew something about, and could understand.

A young Portuguese sailor, with gay neckerchief and gold rings in his ears, sat upon the fallen bole of a dead pine-tree. He had a monkey on his shoulder. The monkey had the grotesque appearance of a melancholy, critical listener. Some youthful descendants of the aboriginals, who had been rashly presented with bows and arrows, stood about holding these weapons of their ancestors in impatient hands. The great outer circle of white faces and their graver costumes had the effect of a cool border, in

which Rachel Buffingdon's face glowed like a stray blossom, set aside for its rareness.

"And you remember Zephaniah Ponkmunnet," were the first words Victoria caught. The dark heads nodded response, and smiles broadened, showing varieties in teeth and sans teeth.

Then Penn told a lively tale from his own recollections of adventure by sea and land, in association with old Zephaniah, whose descendants listened proudly, and his coevals felt as if they, themselves, had taken part in history. Other and still other reminiscences of the times when Penn, as a boy, had been their visitor were brought forward and embellished with humor and a lively fancy, until those humble people suddenly, and never before, realized what days those were. They had not shone with such glamor while they were passing. Their lives — even theirs — had been touched with a gilding they knew not how to name, for they had not the words "romance" and "poetry" in

their vocabularies. They wondered much how this gentleman, whom they remembered as an inquisitive little urchin, had acquired the power to make them laugh and weep.

Ferdinand was so pleased and absorbed that he did not perceive the arrival for which he had anxiously watched. The slowly approaching vehicle made little sound upon the sand and pine needles. But Penn saw it, and the light touches of his irrepressible fancy, the sudden graceful turns of his easy-going phrases, were more spontaneous, more unexpected, than ever.

Victoria, quietly seating herself in the outskirts of the audience, could hardly lift her eyes without meeting his magnetic glance.

"But now," said Penn, dismissing himself, "let me offer you a new boy, in place of the old one, — a little boy who can do what his father could not. Come, Ferdinand, give us a song!"

Ferdinand and the guitar were all ready.

Throwing the bright, becoming ribbon over his neck, with flushed cheeks the handsome little fellow took his father's place, and was received with the wondering silence which is profound applause. He picked away at the guitar, and sang a sweet, sentimental melody, which Victoria had advised, and which dark-blooded people love. Some one came quietly and sat down beside Victoria. She did not look. She knew who it was. Something, everything, seemed to draw him, but only those mournful little hands to repel him; but less and less; somehow, he oftenest forgot them in the counter-charm, which made him feel as if he had, at least, seven delighted senses.

When Ferdinand ceased, there was free applause from the white circle, applause which renewed itself in ejaculations of wonder and delight; and subdued, inarticulate murmurs from the colored people, which grew into petitions for more. Gruff voices pleaded, "Another!" "Give 's another!"

Ferdinand sang "Annie Laurie," and there appeared to be something in the sentiment of the refrain, —

"But for bonnie Annie Laurie
I 'd lay me down and die," —

which turned his thought and look to Victoria, — his glowing, adoring look. He seemed to sing to her alone, and with so much expression that Penn knew not whether to smile or let the tears come. The boyish go, the airy lightness, with that touch of sentimental ardor, were unspeakably captivating. Penn leaned towards his boy and gazed and listened with more and more surprise. All the wondering audience were spell-bound. That a voice of such piercing clearness and overpowering fullness could come from that slender little body seemed miraculous. Whenever he ceased, his audience swayed restlessly and cried excitedly for more. His willingness was inexhaustible. He sang the song of Thaddeus, from "The Bohemian Girl," —

"When other lips and other hearts," —

and again turned to Victoria, who felt her heart melt within her at the grave tenderness of the iterated

> "Then you 'll remember me,
> Then you 'll remember, you 'll remember me."

"He must not sing again," said Victoria; "he is straining his throat."

"Come, then, come, and put a stop to him," said Penn.

He had no idea what she was as a singer. He expected only a sweet, girlish voice. He stepped courteously forward with her, and left her with a look and word which Victoria understood to be of encouragement. She knew how he regarded her, knew she was about to surprise him. She remembered what he had said, — that a singing voice had great power over him, — and glowed with a new elation.

Ferdinand stepped down with as much animation as he had stepped up, when he saw Victoria was going to sing. She stood with her hands folded, her eyes drooped.

Her color came and went. For a moment she seemed to hesitate. Then her lids slowly lifted. Her chest heaved. A soft, melodious breathing electrified the slumberous air. Victoria, herself, thrilled with the first notes of her own voice, which swelled and steadily ascended into a heaven of sound.

This was her song: —

"Asleep in the untuned lyre
Its silent music lies,
And waits but the touch of fire
To wake in transporting sighs.

"Dead, dead in my heart is a song
That I full fain would sing;
Still, breathless, it slumbers upon
A lyre with untuned string.

"O Minstrel with hand of fire,
Minstrel with touch divine,
Touch, waken, lift to the lips
That lifeless song of mine.

"Touch, tune the voiceless string!
Strike at the chords amain!
Strike, till the dumb lips sing
That song of rapture and pain!"

After the first exquisite shock, Penn made two backward steps and stood against the nearest tree. That joyous throe, in which the heart leaps up with a sound like a sob, shook him again and again. The words were of no consequence, — he did not understand them. He only heard the ravishing cry. He who had asked for the touch of a woman's hand, in assurance that love was love, was but a passive thing under the touch of love itself. The unfortunate girl was suddenly an incomparable woman. The common raptures of love seemed but mean delusion compared with the joy of cherishing that glorious, wounded creature. He yearned to kiss the sensitive hands, and gather them into his bosom. He was beside himself, when at length the hands unfolded and fell at her sides, and she turned away. He could not trust himself to go to her, to speak to her. He wandered out from under cover of the wood. There had not been ten minutes of it, yet he seemed to have

been transported to a new world. Never had he breathed such air.

Victoria took the nearest way to a quiet retreat, and Ferdinand followed. She sank down at the foot of a young oak, among the thin underbrush. A long stretch of beach and the unbroken Atlantic were all that lay before her, outside her covert.

"Don't speak to me, Ferdinand," she said, and Ferdinand sat down with a timid, appealing look. She was in a mood which would suffer no jar. In one sweeping glance she had caught the expression of Penn's attitude and face. She could not believe she had done so much more than she had expected to do. She was in bewilderment, in a commotion of joy at the certainty that she had never sung like that before, and at the unmistakable signs of her power. She had not sung to critical ears, it is true, but for a few minutes she had been at the very door of at least one heart, and had felt the magnetic response.

It was just until she could bring her leaping pulses to beat in consonance with common life that she had come to sit there. She listened to the calm throbbing of the sea, and tried to time her heart to that, and to the slowly swinging beam of a buoy that seemed to graze the low slant of the sky. There were sounds of tramping and boys' voices somewhere in the woods, and the occasional tunk of an arrow against the bark of a tree not far away.

Victoria's chief perception, outside her new perturbance, was that there was something touching in Ferdinand's meek silence, and she turned presently to put her hand on his shoulder with a smile of reassurance. Her affection for him was never demonstrative. It still had a little awkwardness of something difficult to express in a language foreign to her.

Ferdinand met this overture with a flush of grateful gladness, but again Victoria's eyes were suddenly diverted. They ex-

pressed an exorbitant wonder. The boy turned to discover the reason of this quick change, and saw what she saw, that his father had stepped down upon the shore a little farther on. Then the figure of Rachel Buffingdon appeared. She stood gesturing with one hand and swinging a bright flower with the other. Presently she took a step forward, and reached up to put the flower into the buttonhole of Penn's coat. While she was thus occupied, Penn appeared to be looking down at her, and suddenly snatching away her hands, he stood holding them, one in each of his own, bending his head over her and talking earnestly. Rachel's head drooped low, and her face made a touch of bright carmine against the pale background of sand. That she and Ferdinand need not be present at the conclusion of this scene, Victoria rose quickly and proposed to return.

"That 's what I thought," said Ferdinand gravely, as they moved away. "Is n't that what it means, sister?"

"How can I know what it means?" said Victoria. "It is none of our concern; none of mine, at any rate." And she repeated this to herself. Nevertheless, a cold weight sank upon her, successfully deadening her leaping pulses. She shrank with a sick dread from renewed encounter with the human race. She would be expected to sing again. Nothing could be more impossible.

They moved slowly through the brush, by the open ways made in frequent crossings from settlement to shore. The whisper of some flying thing made Victoria start and look about. Some swift bird, she thought.

In another moment, with a cry and one lightning movement, Ferdinand placed himself before her with sheltering arms outstretched. Simultaneously with his cry there was the sound of a dull rap, and with a deep sigh he sank down beside the arrow at her feet.

"Ferdinand! Ferdinand!" Victoria cried, kneeling and gathering the little

body into her arms. All its airy lightness was gone. "Speak to me! Speak to me, Ferdinand!"

But the beautiful face seemed slowly turning to marble; and on the breast of her white gown, where the head rested, a scarlet stain spread wider and wider. The heavy lashes quivered, and then remained drooping, the lids almost closed, so that there was a glimpse of the unseeing eyes.

Victoria rose with her burden, and ran, — ran moaning and crying out. In her confusion, she swerved from the straight course across the narrow strip of woods, and was running in a path which took her diagonally by its length, and so into the very path by which Penn had gone to the shore. She saw a woman approaching, as it seemed to her, from the direction of the settlement. In fact, it was Rachel Buffingdon coming up from the shore. "Help! Help!" Victoria cried, and sank down, her fine strength exhausted.

The approaching figure disappeared for a moment, and then, to Victoria's increasing bewilderment, Penn Compton appeared, hurrying with the expression of one who sees a horrible vision. And well that might be, for what could it seem but a vision of horror, — Victoria bowed to earth, and holding in her arms the deathlike form of his boy, her own face as ghastly, her gown and gloves crimson with his blood. It seemed that out of her anguished face there flashed defiance when he stooped to take Ferdinand.

She held the child closer. "He is mine," she began, with a passionate futility. She tried to rise and go on with him, but sank back, shaking. "Ask Caleb Green to bring the wagon," she pleaded. "Oh, no; let me keep him!"

"He is yours," said Penn tenderly. "Only let me see how he is hurt."

With tremulous hands he bent over his child, examined the wound, felt where the

pulse had been, laid his ear against the still breast.

"What was it?" he asked.

"An arrow. O merciful heaven! is he — is he" —

Penn suppressed a groan, remembering the deadly, effectual-looking playthings he had seen flourished about, made as nearly as possible like the aboriginal weapons. "Wait only one minute," he said, and hurried away.

Victoria hid her own face from the sight of the parian face. The blood had ceased to flow. She knew nothing of death, but to lie like that must be death, oh, too surely! She shook the quiet form with her hard sobs. She did not see that Rachel Buffingdon stood silently in the path. Her eyes were red, as if she, too, had been weeping. She had a strangely crushed and humble aspect. But she had gone when Penn reappeared.

"Here is a carriage," he said. "Let me take him to it. Yes, he is yours."

He threw something over Victoria's blood-stained gown, took the child, and they went on.

Some one helped Victoria to the carriage. Many people stood about, but there was not a sound save the whisperings and sighings of the air, which make the country silence seem the more profound.

An old medicine woman was there with water and bottles. She held hartshorn under Ferdinand's nostrils, bathed his head, and tried to pour a drop of cordial between the still lips. But they did not receive it. Life made no response to persuasion, and Penn could not bear to see more of it. He gathered the exquisite image of Ferdinand close, put it into Victoria's arms again, stepped up to the place beside her, and drove rapidly away.

"Friend Rhoda has gone on before us, and Caleb Green has gone across the water for a doctor, to have him there when we arrive," he said consolingly. "Have pa-

tience, we shall get over the three miles very soon."

"A doctor! Do you think there is hope?"

"Yes; let us hope."

Victoria never ceased to look eagerly for some living sign. She pressed her lips to the half-open eyes, that closed obediently at the touch. The head seemed to rest contentedly upon her breast, with the face turned calmly up to hers.

"Let me help you to hold him, pray do!" Penn entreated. "It will be easier if he rests partly on me."

Victoria allowed the once light, supple legs to be stretched across Penn's knees. And so they went on. Not a word more was spoken. When they were about to enter the village street, Penn bent towards his boy — towards them both. Victoria had made a startling revelation to him in the first frantic moment of her fear. Under other circumstances it would have filled him

with profound joy. At present, it doubled his anguish. He suffered for two. As he leaned over them, he opened his lips to speak, but having commanded himself so long, it was at length too long. He set his teeth upon his lip, and turned away.

The little Quaker hamlet was all silent and deserted, for everybody had gone to Indian Neck; but the quiet and deathliness seemed to belong fitly to the moment.

They heard the thunder of the doctor's carriage coming over the bridge. He met them at the door of Friend Rhoda's house.

CHAPTER XI.

FAREWELL.

The gray evening came down upon Rhoda's little house with a hush that was more startling than any sound.

When the suppressed sounds of human emotion, human effort, had died away, silence was only broken by the old Connecticut clock in the kitchen, which marked the indifferent minutes in which nothing was happening, with the same slow precision which had noted the last coming home of Ferdinand.

Even the clocks, if one would listen, talk of this strange thing we are coming to, but Rhoda's sensible old time-keeper persevered in saying only "Be qui-et — be qui-et," and ruled the house with its sonorous voice.

Friend Rhoda had brought Victoria to her own room, in a state of dazed passivity, and having darkened the windows and closed the door, had left her to rest. But rest came not there. Across the little entry-passage was another closed door. Within, — there was rest.

In twenty minutes by the clock, in hours by Victoria's torture, she yielded to the irresistible appeal which seemed to come from that silent room.

She opened the door of Rhoda's room, and looked with awe-dilated eyes across the dividing space. She moved on to the window midway between the rooms, and stood for a moment shivering and gazing out into the dusk. She looked upward, perhaps from some vague understanding that Ferdinand had gone in that direction.

The sober scene, stretching away to the belt of black woods, was veiled in a hazy twilight. The wind made the trees heave lightly, as if they breathed.

The mind is, after all its vaunted privacy, really a public place, always subject to the untimely incursions of other people's ideas. There came uninvited to Victoria's mind that nonchalant saying which had traveled out from Paris: "I keep myself equally ready for eternity and for nothingness."

At this suggestion of a gulf of nothingness as the receptacle of all the loves and sorrows of fervent souls, she started with a wild misgiving to go and look at the empty cover of what, a few hours before, had been as a book of revelation, teeming with sacred promises. She wished to see if not one guarantee had been left to those who had hopefully believed in them.

"What wretched impedimenta of great things have we brought along with us, if we are but creatures of an hour," she thought. "This enormous capacity for anguish, then. We might well have left that behind."

With a resolute movement, she unclosed the door and stepped within the peaceful

room. Upon the bed, which made a pure white place in the surrounding dimness, lay that which was still called Ferdinand. As something too exquisite for exposure, it was covered with a fair pall of fine linen. Victoria folded this back, and disclosed the semblance of her radiant little lover. The new jacket and knickerbockers that were to have fitted him for the journey to New York were donned now for the first time. The charming lips were slightly parted, as if they would have said a word more. As Victoria bent close to see in the dim light what trace divine had been left upon this lovely thing, she was so startled by a sense of its stillness, its chillness, by its mysterious expression and its solemn reticence, that she stepped back trembling, "like a guilty thing surprised." She moaned out her complaint.

Soft as every movement had been, suppressed as was the moan, they were not unheard. A quiet step crossed the threshold. It

hesitated. It came to her side. For a little time they stood there, silent. Then Penn gently laid back the fair pall, and Victoria obeyed the touch and voice which bade her come away.

This careful solicitude had scarcely forgotten her, even during the hour of agonizing suspense in which it seemed to belong all to Ferdinand. Now, it had but the single object, the single direction. All that there was of Penn Compton was involved in the strong current which set altogether towards this one other human life. He brought her out upon the little side porch into the fresh, living air. He arranged a chair for her, and stood by it after she was seated.

"You are shivering!" he complained, in the tone with which a man might bewail his own discomfort.

He hurried away, and returned with a light wrap and a glass of Rhoda's wine. Victoria accepted them with the same be-

numbed passivity with which she had let Rhoda put her to bed.

There was inevitable nearness in the fellowship of their common grief, yet Penn was far from any thought of love-making. In the sudden presence of death, the sudden absence of that joyous life which had been each day a deeper delight to the father's heart, all selfish aims had been swept away. So much had been swept away that they stood upon very simple ground. But there is a certain unpremeditation which falls upon such hours as these. One cannot quite foresee what he will do. He ceases to have intentions, and is swept hither and thither unmercifully.

The usual neighborly helpers and comforters were with Friend Rhoda. They seemed to pervade the house. The subdued murmurs of their voices stole out upon the stillness of the night.

"May I sit here with you?" Penn asked.

"Yes, do," Victoria replied.

They remained long in the hush which follows the first hours of grief. Nothing could be lonelier, more stimulating to sorrow, than the scene which stretched away before them into the open wilds and darker woodlands. This was overhung by a cloudy heaven, which left material things in an obscurity much like the spirit's outlook. There seemed to be something beyond, — some motive for imagination, — one could not see what, until morning. All the sounds and ripe odors of waning summer spoke of things that were going into the still interval of the perpetual alternation between life and death. To Victoria, death already seemed to reign triumphant. It was as if no one had ever died before.

"Ah, the dreary, horrible darkness!" she said at length.

"To me," Penn replied, not dreaming into what he was plunging, — "to me, there is a comforting light."

"Yes, there are suppositions and theories."

"The comfort I find is in no supposition. It is in the human presence, here beside me."

"But where is *he?* Where is *he?*" The forlorn little hands reached out into the hollow gloom.

"I know of at least one place where he is," said Penn; and then, with an eager outreaching too, "Come to it," he said abruptly, as if from some electrical necessity. "Come to my heart — *dearest!*" The words leaped to his lips as sparks from a smothered fire, touched by a sudden draught.

Victoria was confounded by this startling, untimely outbreak; but while she held herself aloof, her helpless, imprisoned hands were gathered and cherished there, — against the heart which held Ferdinand.

In the confusion and inability of persons to find her things, when the bloodstained dress had been changed, Friend Rhoda had substituted for the proper ones a pair of

her own thread gloves, which merely hung upon Victoria's hands. She had seemed not to know, or not to care. Now, in another moment, — a rash moment, — the hideous gloves were stripped away, and the quivering flesh covered with tender, worshiping kisses.

"*How dare you!*" The tone was low, but the voice trembled and broke with indignation.

It was not so much the outrage to her hands, the bold unbaring of her infirmity, which Victoria resented; not even that, so much as the memory of that scene upon the shore, when he held Rachel Buffingdon's hands. She glowed with helpless wrath, that he should presume to put her in a line of succession. She recovered her own hands, and hurried panting to the room which she was to have, and which she determined thenceforth to keep, in Friend Rhoda's house. There, after Friend Rhoda had bidden her good-night, — there she sat

during the remainder of it, alone, in the darkness, in a passionate agony of protest, more impassioned, more agonized, because forever and ever futile.

She wore the short summer night away, and when "the pale, purple even" melted, she turned to where it seemed to unclose around the flight of Ferdinand, and craved to follow. For eighteen years a world without any appreciable human affection, a world in which man had probably been the same unsatisfactory being, had been good enough for her, but not so now, not now!

As for Penn, who had recoiled from the brief angry outbreak as from a physical blow, he had risen up as she went from him, and stood there self-confounded. In this after-view he saw his audacious act as a violation of the shrinking seclusion in which the proud creature held her poor hands. He saw it as a shameful outrage. He raged at himself. He sank down overwhelmed, as if a great wave had gone over him.

In spite of longing and endeavor, Penn caught no glimpse of Victoria again until he saw her at Ferdinand's funeral. He was shocked at her pallor, at all the evidences of her weariness and suffering. His own tormented soul yearned towards her more and still more. He had not been visited by a moment's peace since his presumption. A place had been left for Victoria near his own, by Ferdinand's side, but she took a chair farther away.

There is soothing in the quiet of a Quaker funeral to some grief-stricken ones, but to Victoria it all seemed intolerable. The Friends came with befitting solemnity into Rhoda's open house, took their seats, and remained as immovable as the dead. Perhaps, in passing, they looked at Ferdinand. Then an expression of horror enlivened their countenances, at the small litter of flowers which lay upon his coffin, and the more abhorrent sight of a dead boy bedecked with roses; for with Rhoda's consent, Victo-

ria had laid a few rosebuds upon his breast, and in his hand. His guitar stood in a corner, covered with something soft and white.

The last person arrived, and settled into stillness. Some one heaved a wheezy sigh. A fly droned across the room. Every shutter had been closed. Awful silence, and darkness intensified by the golden bars of daylight between the shutter slats. This endured so long that it appeared to Victoria they had entered upon an eternity of silence and darkness, when, like a resurrection, a white-haired man arose in a dim corner, and removing his hat, deliberately applied that scourge of human sorrow, made that libeling charge, which is like twitting the sufferer upon the rack, that it is for our sins we are afflicted. Short and shocking was the note of warning, and all was silent again, — darker, more hopeless. Presently there was a movement. Victoria knew what it meant. Her throat ached, her chest

heaved from suffocation. With a gesture of protest she arose, placed her hand like a possessor upon that which compassed the last of Ferdinand, and stood looking down upon the seraphic face, while everybody waited. Since this was the very last, it behooved them to wait — to wait. Ah, when could she turn away, and say that she had looked enough? It seemed to others that she had stood there much too long, when suddenly there came a clear strain from Rhoda's pine-tree, — that challenging call to which Ferdinand had always given response. There was a wait, and then followed that pensive, heavenly variation upon the short score of the meadow lark, in which he touches a minor note. It is a scrap of divine melody; the utterance of a spirit, that

> "Of death must deem
> Things more true and deep
> Than we mortals dream."

It is the sweetness of sadness, hovering just upon the verge of joy. All the sunny air

outside was pierced by it. How it cut the stillness into blessed, crystal sound!

It was Ferdinand's requiem. When it was done, Victoria, breathing deeply, forgetting all things else, remembering only Ferdinand, sang also for him, for only him: —

"Angels ever bright and fair."

The Friends sat helpless. Some were red, and some pale, but only a few left the house. For the most part, it was supposed that the poor girl had lost her senses. Friend Rhoda, with timid boldness, stepped over and stood beside Victoria. Penn Compton stood up with lowly bowed head, and tears that fell like a boy's.

These were the obsequies of Ferdinand.

CHAPTER XII.

RACHEL BUFFINGDON'S OUTBREAK.

But what availed it that Victoria knew the keenness of suffering and sorrow, the sweetness of sympathy, and the anguish of love? She was going back to teach the piano to beginners; a work in which one needs to be without too much feeling. She had, indeed, learned the cry of the human heart, — its cry of want. That which the world chiefly desires is some note of joy. She had no such note to offer.

She still remained with Friend Rhoda, in the lonely outskirts of the village. The moaning in the belt of pines which stretched across their western boundary was the only complaint heard in that house. The two women were equally quiet and self-con-

tained. The only difference was in the reality and endurance of this appearance. In Victoria's solitary walks upon the shore, she found more actual congruity in the commotion of the sea. Her love stood apart from her hatred of what she regarded as Penn's transgression. This last had prevailed in her refusal to see him again. In spite of his humble prayer for one word, he had gone back to Philadelphia utterly denied, for Victoria declined to parley with one who made love serially; declined love marred by a profligacy which left one suffering for the loss of what another had gained, yet she also declined to look at Rachel Buffingdon's sad face, because it accused her lover. That Rachel had suffered in her flirtation with Penn was evident. If there could have been a doubt of this, it must have been dismissed on that evening when Victoria, going homeward over the fields, was about to cross the little thread of a stream which carried the waters of the chain of ponds to

the sea. She paused and turned when she was about to set foot upon the plank which bridged it, to look with reminiscent gaze across the water where she and Ferdinand had paddled about. A heavenly glory touched it. The young saplings on the margin were gilded with red gold. The meadow lark was swimming in the soft, effulgent air, and dipping towards its nest. Under some stunted willows the boat still lay rocking.

Victoria stood long, with dazzled eyes and lips parted by quick breathing, listening to strains that seemed to have been left forever floating in the air, whose waves had rippled to the tones of Ferdinand's voice, as the waters to his oar. She was so rapt by the feeling that there was something of Ferdinand in the sunny atmosphere, so attent to its ethereal murmurs, that she was easily startled by the sound of a footstep.

"Ah!"

"Oh!"

These ejaculations came almost simultaneously from opposite ends of the plank. Victoria and Rachel Buffingdon confronted each other gravely across its length. Each was surprised. Each stood aside ceremoniously, and offered way to the other. Victoria, waiting in vain for an assent to her courtesy, looked at Rachel's pale roses and the mournful curves of her lips, until she was touched with a tender compassion. She crossed the plank. "Are n't you well?" she asked, with a manner which was full of vague volition, but in which pity too visibly took the chief part.

"Oh, yes; I 'm well," Rachel answered, with the faintest imitation of a bitter smile.

"I 'm sorry you don't look so."

"Is thy own health very good?"

"I have n't thought about that. I think only of the loneliness — the" — Victoria caught her trembling lip with her teeth.

Rachel closed her own lips tighter.

"He seems to be everywhere — every-

where," continued Victoria, "but only just out of reach. Ah, he was so joyous, so companionable!"

"He was hideous!"

Victoria stepped back. "You say that of *Ferdinand?*" she murmured.

"I have n't had a thought of Ferdinand," said Rachel.

"But who" —

Rachel looked into the eyes exactly level with her own. The two lovely faces seemed mutually inquiring of each other.

"I must speak, or I shall die!" cried Rachel, letting pride go all at once. "I must know what some other girl would think. Oh, if thee knew what I 've done, and what has been said to me, thee 'd look upon me as degraded. I 've been dragged in the dust."

Victoria turned pale. Her lips moved, but she did not speak.

"He said I was to take *thee* for my pattern," continued Rachel. "It 's too great a

pattern for my small material. But only tell me how bad I seem to thee. Tell me if I 'm sunk too low" —

Victoria sat down upon the washed-out roots of an old pollard willow. "You had better not say any more," she said.

"I *must!*" cried Rachel. "If I am such a creature, people ought to know it. I 'm not a hypocrite, at any rate. It was on 'Black and White Day' that I did the very worst. I seemed to be possessed. I kept doing bad things. There was something about Penn Compton that provoked me. Thee must have noticed how he looks down, — the kind of smile he has? Ought men to be allowed to smile like that, and women only permitted to stand and be smiled at? No. There ought to be a change in these matters, and I set out to make one. I undertook to provoke *him.* They wanted to give the colored people their pipes to smoke, and they supposed Penn had the tobacco in his pockets. I saw where he had

gone, and I offered to get it from him. But he had not the tobacco. He had only a horrible temper. He looked wrought up. He did not smile. I think now it might have been the effect of that strange song of thine, that made me, too, wish for some unheard of thing, never to be got. I did n't understand it, but that 's how it troubled me. But I thought it was *I* who was troubling *him! I!* Idiot! I had a red rose in my hand. I reached up to tuck it into a buttonhole of his coat. I told him, in my silly fashion, that he needed it to give him a more cheerful aspect. I looked up — straight into his eyes. They flashed like lightning in a dark night. He looked like — like — Beelzebub. I stuck out my lips at him. O Miss Montagu! Can it be that he thought — Could he have imagined — Should you have dreamed that I meant — meant — Oh, yes, he *did*, I could see. He snatched my hands away with a clutch like a tiger. I repented. I was frightened.

He was horrible. Oh, how he — how he spoke to me! How did he dare? I wish I could die when I think of it, and I think of it always. '*Don't do these things!*' he said, like an angry schoolmaster. And he went on to tell me that they were *improper;* that some day I would find myself injured; that there were men who would make me suffer on account of them. He went on till I felt as if I belonged to the offscouring of the earth. I dragged my hands away. I ran with the thought of hiding myself at the bottom of one of the ponds. I do believe I should have done it, if I had not met thee with Ferdinand. That shock turned away the fury until I was too weak to dare to do it. How can a girl wish to live, when she has been told that she is *improper;* that it is difficult to recognize the difference between her ways and the ways of people impossible to mention? And yet I do wish to live. But I came here to look at this little stream and see if it would not tempt me. The pond

is so big it frightens me, but I was thinking it would be only to step off this plank, and lie in this little quiet, shining bed for a few minutes, and the mortification would be all over. And then thee stood in the way again."

"I'm so glad I did!" said Victoria. "Heaven be praised!" She looked transfigured. A soft radiance shone in her moist eyes and her tremulous smile. She laid a hand upon each of Rachel's shoulders. "Tell me, tell me, do you love him?" she demanded.

"*Love?* I *loathe* him!" Rachel declared with convincing emphasis.

In another instant, the girl who loved and the girl who loathed were folded in each other's arms. One sobbed with wholesome abandon, while the other was in that ecstasy which makes tears a divine delight.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE GENERAL'S SUCCESSFUL SORTIE.

To go backward a little: there was an evening when the general, as usual, was sitting at his post by the roadside, in front of Nathan Green's house. There came along a cozy little carriage, with an elegant fellow for a horse, finished off with a judicious display of horse jewelry, including a bright clinking chain, which swung down his front, much in the fashion of a watch-chain.

The general was so engrossed by admiration of this gay creature that he scarcely noticed the modest beings who sat behind him, until they had almost passed, but then, catching sight of a pair of cat-whiskers, and round, shining eyes, he made a furious leap,

and for the first time in his life stooped to the foolish dog practice of following and barking at a passing vehicle.

How he did go on for half a mile, to the irritation of the sensitive, inoffensive man against whom all this fury was directed! The driver lashed at the dog with his long whip, which brought the general up to his full potency. He was an embodied frenzy. He was nothing short of terrible.

During some time that followed, this mistaken dog was left to do much as he pleased, or as he could contrive, for Victoria was engrossed in matters in which he was not invited to take part. He frequently strolled off over the roads, and kept one eye open when he dozed under the willows before the house, to know if the arch-enemy came that way.

It very soon and repeatedly transpired that this savage-looking animal was encountered in divers ways by an astonished and indignant master of music, who said to

his man: "John, find out to whom belongs that beast, and give notice that if he is not chained, he will have reesk of a shooting."

"He belongs to a young lady, sir, — a summer boarder, — over there among the Quakers," said John. "I asked the stage-driver."

"A young lady? What is her name?"

There was a dawning association of some young lady with a big, offensive dog in the master's mind.

"Miss Montagu, I believe she 's called, sir," John replied.

"A—h! John, I will speak to Mees Montagu myself. You shall do noting."

But it was long before the master of music was able to attend to this matter, and meantime Victoria continued anxiously absorbed, while the general remained unhappy and unchained.

The master was not indifferent to the fact that Miss Montagu was staying scarcely six miles from his cottage. He had never

forgotten the girl who had resolved to find her soul. To be rid of her dog, he more and more desired, yet this was but one of his objects, when he resolved to pay her a visit.

It was after he had dined one evening, — that same sweet evening when Rachel Buffingdon had explained, — it was after dining, when he was feeling very kindly, that he ordered his carriage to drive over to the Quaker village.

He was still more strongly induced to this by having just heard of Victoria's misfortune. The story touched his sympathies deeply, and a little later, as he rolled along towards the Quaker village, the thought of her produced a sadness which the quiet evening sounds turned to absolute melancholy, — the melancholy of the musical temperament at nightfall, when it feels the untuned condition of things in this world.

"You may walk, John," he said, for he felt a sudden reluctance, a dread of meeting

this peculiarly unfortunate girl, and finding her doubly destitute. He wished to think that something might be done to help her to make a resource of her really fine voice. Some secondary place she could fill, in his difficult opinion. He had never been willing to deal with that quality of things. He was not willing then. He felt compelled by benevolent pity, even if she still sang with the same cool, empty exactness.

Moving very slowly, the twilight had deepened into dusk, as they came to the Quaker village. John was looking along for the little old brown house to which he had been directed, when the master called to him.

"You may stop!"

John pulled up, and the master of music leaned forward, listening intently to a sound which his acute ear had caught above the grinding of the wheels and the trampling of the horse.

"Wait here," he said then, and alighting,

he moved slowly forward in the direction of this sound with a manner of keen suspense. A little farther, and his eyes became animated; a few steps more, and his movement was lighter, his face brighter.

At length he was where the melodious tones hovered close, like a rich fragrance. From the little old weather-worn brown house they came. He stopped, and stood like a statue before its open door. Presently he removed his hat. The bowed gray head drooped lower.

It is but a light and common thing, — crude joy. But this song to which the master listened was full of the grave, sweet, unfathomable joy which none can know who has not tasted sorrow. So magnetically touching, so heavenly tender, it floated out upon the tranquil evening, it seemed to reach, to seek, to penetrate, the needy human heart. It was like a rapturous idea; like a liberated soul, soaring away to its heaven.

Not as a musical critic, but as another soul, the master listened. He felt himself in the presence of something worshipful, for it was a touch of the sacred fire which had given life to that superb voice. No matter what words it uttered; it was full, full, where it had been devoid.

And when the last exquisite tone had melted into silence, the master moved gravely forward as if going to a formal ceremony, — moved directly to the feet of the singer, and bending upon his knee, in an old fashion of the Old World, raised her hand to his lips.

"Now it is I who ask to be received," he said.

Upon the entrance of a stranger, Rhoda had risen and hastily lighted the large kerosene lamp. As it suddenly flooded the room with its rays, Victoria saw shining in the master's eyes the tear, — the price of the peri's admittance.

The master himself, with some revulsion of feeling, beheld seated in the doorway the original instigator of his visit.

The general had retired to some region where he could indulge in suppressed howls while the singing continued, but at its close, returned to beg a place in Rhoda's little parlor.

There he sat, with a complacent smile on his honest face, surveying the scene with enormous satisfaction, and taking all the credit to himself of having followed up the foe and brought him humbly to the feet of his mistress. From the look of shining happiness on her face, he perceived that everything was now quite as it should be, quite as he had wished it to be, and moving grandly forward, he waved his tail as a flag of truce.

CHAPTER XIV.

A CHARMING TUNE.

After Rachel Buffingdon's explanation, Victoria again addressed a letter to the father of Ferdinand. It confessed that she had misjudged him. It asked pardon.

But again she had no reply.

The master was sometimes surprised by the expression of passionate despair with which she rendered her exercises. Again, he was elated by some such quality in the right place. But there were still other times when he was appalled by a touch of the old inanimate exactness. "Ach, Gott!" he would exclaim, "is it some accident of the hour, some personal feeling which we have for dependence?"

And this after she had returned to the

city, and her feet were surely set in that path which her ambition had sought.

But at length there came, as the inspiration of every note which she sang, as the impulse of every act of her life, a steady, stirring presumption, which kept the flame alive. Victoria took a large resolve. There was once a man in China, she remembered, who knew only one word of Chinese, but he took a fort with it. For her part, she knew of something almost as small, which might serve her as great an accommodation. This little something was conceived and born; and then it rested, waiting for its hour.

Nothing takes impetus like the things that have waited. For the very reason that she herself had waited, Victoria advanced rapidly in her preparation for the great place she expected to fill. As the woman developed, the artiste matured. The master wondered at himself that he had not recognized the possible fruit in the flower; that he had not counted upon the glow of the

summer sun. He was as eager for the goal as Victoria. To hasten her triumph, he sent her to Europe, — he and her rich, far-away relatives. She planned that she was to repay them enormously, when she had the revenue of a queen.

And how scrupulously for her end she denied herself even the species of food she most desired; abstained from heated things when heat was agreeable; from cold things, when coldness would have been delicious; how she kept silence when she wished to talk, and remained housed when she would have rejoiced to face the storm. She accepted willingly all those allotments against which her physical senses rebelled, and seemed to be the mere repository of a voice, — a voice which demanded the cherishments of something rare, something priceless, something beloved, and threatened with innumerable dangers.

Those two years of earnest effort and restless passivity were to Victoria a gap in

life which she must needs get over to reach the solid ground of her desire. And so they must be in this story, which is not a history of her musical progress.

On the nearer side of this chasm of time we may look for some result of all this elaborate intention and determination, and discover it the more directly in company with one to whom it will be most unexpected. Never a ship returned to shore which did not bring somebody to the unexpected.

It was late in the afternoon, and March was going out like a lion, when the City of Rome came to rest in her dock at New York. The state of her decks, and the eager gladness on the sick faces of those coming off the ship, announced that the voyage had not been one of pleasure.

There is at least one passenger who exhibits none of this gladness of arrival, however. He proceeds to hunt up and rescue his luggage with the manner of an automaton, compelled by its machinery. After long

waiting and perambulating in a great, barn-like custom house, he discovers his trunk, and sits down upon it in the stolid, uncomplaining fashion of an old traveler. He has been moving across and athwart the earth for nearly three years, writing up aspects and situations, and making foreign affairs seem remarkably variable, complicated, and edifying to the journal-reading public, while his own remain forever simple, monotonous, and misguided. He is undisturbed by worrying women, weeping children, and uneasy men. But presently an offensively fresh and cheerful-looking youth comes in and takes a place beside him. As he stands thoughtfully looking about at the newly landed passengers, he is softly whistling a tune. His weary neighbor feels something tender and sweet in the tune, but he resents the cheerfulness of the whistler, for he has been unhappy and tired so long that he is chronically cross, and hates whistling and everything, especially himself.

The cheerful youth appears to seek and find not, but he never moves, and never ceases to whistle until he has fixed his tune indelibly in some cells of the cross man's brain.

The custom-house officer at length advances, tosses up things in this man's steamer trunk, and lets him have it taken away. As he goes on up town with it in the early dusk of evening, made ghostly by the mingling of the blue electric glare, the air is raw, there are whirlpools of dust, and this morose and miserable being perceives how he hates New York. He has no desire to be there, nor upon any other spot of the earth. He would not turn over a penny to remain an inhabitant of this planet, or be transported to some other.

His keen letters, however, have given him fame among journalists and journal readers, and a leading journalist of New York has cabled to him here and there with a view to opening negotiations with him for the future.

To-morrow he will visit this eminent person, but he has himself deposited for the night at the hotel where he believes he can be most quiet, and get rest for his dizzy brain.

There is at least one solace for fretted humanity. It can go to bed. Still other alleviations there doubtless are, for those who would choose them. But Penn Compton went to bed. He seemed to be still rising and sinking upon the wave. He had but a sole, solitary wish, — to go to sleep. After long waiting, he was just about to come into possession of this only gift of worth, when a piano in an adjoining room was struck by some cunning-fingered fiend.

That tune again!

Penn wakened to a degree seldom attained by the insomnolent. The tune was executed *con expressione*. He perceived it to be an exquisitely captivating, appealing harmony, and he knew that if he had a good temper he should lie quietly listening, and liking it. But on the contrary, he tossed with a degen-

erate sort of Spartan endurance until long after the tune had ceased, and then launched upon a night of restless dreams, haunted by music of lost days, which wakened him from time to time to the weight of recollection kindly lifted by sleep. It was a weight which he had carried bravely, upon the whole, but not in the manner of a saint. The effort had given his face a settled frown, and marked deep lines upon it. The next morning, — each and every morning, — with the return of consciousness, it came down upon him anew, like the settling of a millstone. Therefore he arose in a hurry he had acquired by the habit of giving no quarter to recollection. What work was next to be done? This was the only proposition he entertained.

He made ready for his visit to the journalist as if his life depended upon it, whereas for the result he cared nothing, except that it might be the means of sending him to traverse the earth again. To

drive on was a necessity which an unquiet soul put upon an unwilling, flagging body.

By nine o'clock, he was on his way. As he crossed from Fifth to Sixth Avenue, to take the elevated road, and passed the open window of an overheated house, it came out upon him again, — that tune! New York seemed to be given over to the performance of it. And as he went on down town it began to hum in his own brain. It did not keep time with the rattle of the train. He perceived with annoyance that this accompaniment was too quick, discordant, destructive. It was a charming tune!

When he entered the famous, towering building where his business called him, it took its own proper, uninterrupted rhythm, and as he could not choose, he let it have way, — let it possess him. But as he emerged from the elevator, and moved down the great corridor, he met a young man with hands full of papers, who swung round the corner of a cross-corridor, and came

marching down upon him with apparent premeditation, humming in a clear falsetto the very same strain. It was beginning to seem farcical. Penn looked unpleasantly at the hummer, who never minded, but having finished, began again.

To get Penn out of this mad state of things as soon as possible, let it be said that when his business with the journalist and some contingent matters were finished, he went on down to sane and sober Philadelphia, where all the tunes are not alike. No; here was a hand-organ playing airs from "The Mikado," and there, a reasonable boy whistling "Yankee Doodle."

But even so, Penn was not free. As he took his way to the office of his old friend, the Philadelphia journalist whom he had all along been serving, to express to him his new intentions, —

"Mm-*mm*-mm-mm,
Mm-mm-mm-mm-mm-mm,"

he hummed to himself, altogether against

his will. Strangest thing which had happened to him for nearly three years! It seemed the tune to which all things were moving. The joyous greeting of his old friend scarcely interrupted it. The office clock ticked to it. The boy who came in stepped to it. Two or three times in pauses of conversation Penn gathered up his lips forgetfully, as if about to whistle.

It was a long and very private conversation. The two friends used the language of old Haverford days. They called each other "Penn" and "Ben," and fell into the colloquial solecisms of Quaker grammar. Ben's agreed tolerably with the schoolbook, but Penn's fell easily into the Quakerville fashion.

"In one way, thou 'rt an unmitigated disappointment," said Ben at last, "but in other ways, thou 'st gone beyond anything I could have dreamed. No, confound thee, we can no longer expect to retain the sort of fellow thou 'st got to be."

"Don't think it is for the sake of a few more shekels," said Penn. "It is n't that. I only want to be moving. I shall keep on while my legs last, and then — jump overboard."

"What in thunder does it all mean?" Ben exclaimed in a furious undertone, equivalent to a roar, with a thump on the office desk well muffled by the plumpness of his fist.

"I wish I could think I had any meanings," said Penn dully.

"Umph! Th' means the undoing of my best-laid plans," said Ben. "Look here, my boy! I should have liked right well to be harnessed up with thee for life. Could n't stand it? It would find thee better content in the end. Th' might have all the stock thee wished; th' might have Emily, — 'gold enough and Emilie.' Remember that, when those foreigners lay hold of thee!"

"I remember that, but for thee, I should never have found my place in the world,

dear old Ben," said Penn Compton, with something resembling his own charming smile.

"Well, don't decide yet. Wait a little. Come home to dinner with me now," said Ben, getting up and bringing the discussion to an end.

They went on arm in arm up town, always to that tune.

It was a direction Penn liked to take. There had been a time when he liked many things, and one of them was Ben's old house, which had come from his ancestors, and had many things within its walls which belonged to the times of William Penn and General Washington. Penn could not feel the same indifference towards its sombre hall, its simple panelings and cornices, its broad, low staircase, and its heavy mahogany furniture, that he felt for almost all things. He entered it with something like pleasure.

He knew the habits of this house, — knew that the pretty mother was at this hour

upstairs with her little ones, and when Ben left him with excuses, that it was to run up and say good-night to his babies, too.

Penn made himself at home, as he had been bidden, placed a screen worked in faded crewels between himself and the fire, drew up to the golden light of the yellow-shaded lamp, and was about to take up the evening news when

"Mm-*mm*-mm-mm,
Mm-mm-mm-mm-mm-mm"

came from an adjoining room, the door of which stood open.

The visitor pressed his hand to his head, and stepped quickly forward to the door through which the sound came.

A box and wrapping papers lay on the floor, and Emily, — a young sister of Mrs. Ben's, whom Penn might have loved, — Emily stood before a small oblong mirror trying on a blue bonnet. The mirror had an upper division, in which was a picture of a vain and frivolous shepherdess. The real

girl who confronted it was a fine contrast of grave earnestness. Her look was critical, but it changed to swift, blushing confusion when she saw the very face she was remembering look out at her beside her own from the mirror.

"Ah!" she cried, turning to face its double in the doorway, and then drawing away with a manner of speculation. "It has the appearance of Mr. Compton, but these silent things are commonly ghosts."

"No, I 'm the haunted one," Mr. Compton declared. "I should like to know — for heaven's sake, do tell me, what is that you were singing?"

"Well, you *have* been far away! I thought everybody in Christendom knew that. It 's Victoria Montagu's encore song. She is the new singer who has been making such a sensation in New York. She sings something perfectly grand, and when she 's encored, gives that little bit of a song, or if she does not, they keep calling until she

does. They are bound to have it. Everybody is wild about it. Well, how do you do? I should hardly have known you. You don't smile as pleasantly as you used. What's the matter, Mr. Compton? Anything the matter with *me?* Oh, this bonnet! It *is* a failure, is n't it?" She cast the bonnet aside. She was a charming girl in it or out of it. "Do come and sit down," she went on. "Tell me about the times and the manners in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Begin with something about yourself."

"I have been telling for some years now. I 'm entitled to be a listener. What is the last chapter of Miss Emily's history?" Penn had a stiff, vague manner with this girl whom he might have loved.

"We have been in those dull periods which the historian skips over," returned the girl, whose own manner was one of well-suppressed excitement. "Oh, I 've been to New York, though, and heard Montagu.

I am full of that, you see, and if I must give an address, let us have her for the subject. She has been giving representations from opera. The newspapers spread out her glorification so that you must have come across it somewhere. No? Well, it's a pity our own could n't have taken rather a different tone. She is going to sing here next week, and it must have been Patterson who wrote this, — don't you think so? He 's always afraid he shall be too approving. He wants to pass for a critic, yet he does n't know where to take hold. As you are bent upon being a listener, listen to this, and do, *do* go and hear Montagu, and offset it with something splendid, — will you?

"'It is announced that Victoria Montagu is to be the star of the great subscription concert. This is unexpected condescension, for it has been understood that she would sing no more in public until next winter, when there is to be a season of grand opera in New York, and Miss Montagu will step

at once from artiste to diva. She seems a star of magnitude. The question is, have we here a fixed star? Is Miss Montagu great, or is she only beguiling? Have our judgments received a sprain which makes them unable to act, and is there anything, for instance, to account for the plaudits bestowed upon that now famous song, "If *I* should dare"? There is something to be regretted in her new rendering of it. We have wondered at the mysterious hold it takes upon the listener; wondered at the passionate tenderness she gives to the little chanson; wondered at the personal effect of that emphatic *I;* but now we wonder at the loss of impetus and spontaneity. Where is that piquant effect of the first offer of the song, — the effect of seeming to reach out, to hope, to ask and expect a response? The new tone is one of sorrow. It does not take like the old one. Miss Montagu is calm and supreme in presence, full of daring impulse in song. Those

who have not already heard her may thank some good star for this especial favor to Philadelphia.'

"There! that 's all he vouchsafes to say, when other critics are in raptures. But how I wish we did know why she says '*I*' so emphatically. Everybody wants to know that. It 's her own song, you know, in which she tells somebody what *she* would do if *she* dared. Why does n't she say, 'If I should *dare*'? That seems the natural way. I think she means that somebody began and dared first. I should like to know who he was, — the man who dared to dare. She is so absolutely splendid, and prouder than a queen, for queens condescend to have their photographs scattering round, but there is n't a picture of Victoria Montagu to be had for any consideration whatever. Whoever wants to know how she looks must go and look at her. Well, Mr. Compton, I hope you have n't brought home any of those horrid foreign plagues. Your

cheeks have a decidedly feverish tinge, and your eyes, — your eyes are positively startling. I don't believe you've heard a word of my lecture. You've been thinking of something else!"

CHAPTER XV.

STAR OF EVENING AND MORNING.

It is a night of spring, of that reacting time when people sink under the depression of winter, or lift up their heads again, at the command of nature to revive. And there is the rebound from Lenten restrictions. People are charmed by the prospect of being conspicuous listeners at the grand concert. Innumerable carriages, gayly laden with spring fashion from as many starting-points, all converge towards the same destination. The city is pervaded and invaded by people delicately gloved, bearing fans and opera glasses. The Academy of Music is ashine with moons of lamps and stars of jewels, and softly overcast by bright clouds of apparel, out of which smile faces which

may be those of angels. In the murmur of chatting voices, one name alone is heard; fabulous things are told and repeated, all of one person, — the star of the concert. Various romantic fictions are afloat of heroic deeds in which she ruined her hands. These are supported by the fact of her always wearing gloves, and increase the interest in the future diva.

After the overture — "Zampa" — there is a suite of lesser lights before the star shines out: a robust contralto, who almost gains an encore with her song, "Patria," in spite of the impatience of the audience to be getting on; a pretty and popular tenor, who is called to repeat his alluring invitation, "Look into mine eyes, love;" the duet of the mezzo-soprano and baritone; the cavatina of the basso.

Then every eye is fixed upon the point where the star will rise. There is eager expectancy. The soft, promising strains of the orchestra introduce the dream motive

from "Lohengrin," and then there is a vision of purest white, made dazzling by the golden glow of the footlights. She is coming to conquest. That is the air which sits so becomingly upon her. Proudly, graciously, she advances, with a radiant look, but no smile, bowing acknowledgments to the warm, welcoming applause. There is quiet for an instant, and then she sings, "Einsam in trüben tagen."

In the elevation and enchantment of the movement, the singer seems oblivious of her audience. Her wistful eyes appear to be looking for the swan-drawn boat. She seems to breathe the very life and spirit of Elsa, yet it is not the son of Parsifal whom she would rejoice to discover.

She dreams her dream to its close. In the glowing energy of her finale, she is even more a vivid woman than an accomplished artist.

Almost simultaneously with her last note there is a ringing outburst of applause,

from which she retreats, pursued by an imperative recall. She makes acknowledgments, and repeats them, while the plaudits swell, and then with a deeper glow of light and color in her face, she kindly returns to the footlights.

The dream is repeated. With thoughtful rapture the singer once more invites the vision of her love. She sings with an access of warmth, with magnetic compulsion of every heart towards herself. She is irresistible.

As she bows to right and left, and sweeps her clear eyes across the front of the house, she is aware of something coercive which draws and fixes them upon a thin, strong-featured face, that stands out vividly from among the rest, by reason of its pressing forward, and its frowning tenseness. It has some look of delirium. You would say, "There is a fanatic."

The singer feels a species of fear. She is seized with trembling, as she retreats

from the noisy praise of her audience. Her heart suffocates her.

And now the persistent call is well understood to be for the little encore song. She is to sing of what she would dare. But suddenly she dares not. The hour for which she has worked, and hoped, and waited, is there. The one to whom it was to be dedicated is there. Everything is ready — waiting. But how is it possible to pour out her tender song to one grown so strange and stern?

The imperative call swells louder. If she hesitates, she is lost. She steps quickly forward, trampling and sweeping the votive bouquets without seeing them. The orchestra is already playing the prelude to the famous song.

The song begins. Not with its usual piquant impulse. Not at all as it was ever intended to begin. In that profound stillness, the singer seems to muse in tremulous melody, with her hands clasped behind

her and her eyes cast down, as if she were humble, afraid. One must needs attend to catch the veiled sounds. Never, it seems, has the little song been executed with so little execution, until, as if wakening to some new and strenuous thought, just as her audience are ready to be disappointed, she lifts her head and clasps her hands in front, with an exquisite effect of gentle abandon. The song lifts, too, as it proceeds. It becomes a torrent of tender pathos, and is poured out with new freshness, warmth, and richness to its last intoxicating drop, and to the complete inebriation, apparently, of one of her listeners, for when some of the audience rise up in the enthusiasm of their laudations, he rises, too, and goes out with a step as unsteady as that of an imprudent wine-bibber.

The master of music was there, too. He would have traveled five times the distance

to Philadelphia to worship this new sovereign.

More adorable than greatness is something on the threshold of greatness, surely and steadily stepping up.

It was after the act from "Ernani," — after Miss Montagu had sung the "Ernani involami" with such brilliancy of joyous impulse, — that the master knocked at the door of the ante-room which admitted to her dressing-room. He had come to tell her that she already stood upon a pinnacle. He knocked, he opened, and stood mute before a scene not scored in the opera. The noble Spanish lady, in her stiff yellow brocade, her black lace mantilla, her jewels, her embroidered shoes, was in the arms — not of the brigand Ernani! She was giving all her unburied soul through her honest, unclouded eyes to one who could not at once throw off the frown he had worn so long, but breaking, shining triumphantly through

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